PATTERNS OF POWER · THE MONGOL EMPIRE

THE MONGOL EMPIRE

The Complete Study · 1206 — 1241 — 1260

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with Claude (Anthropic) · 2026

held as tested, not revealed

Held as tested, not revealed.

A case study in the Patterns of Power series.
Primary sources quoted exactly; modern scholarship paraphrased and credited.
Contested figures given as ranges. Nothing reconstructed from memory.

CONTENTS

PREFACE
Preface and Outline

LANDSCAPE
The Place Where the Kingdom Is Held Together

MODULE 1
Let Us Not Stop for Booty

MODULE 2
Let No One Alter the Blue Writing

MODULE 3
From the Rising of the Sun to Its Setting

MODULE 4
As Soon as They Are Two or Three Years Old

MODULE 5
Four Hundred Craftsmen

MODULE 6
One Sheep from Every Hundred

MODULE 7
I Shrank from Recording It

MODULE 8
A Falconer Found the Camp

MODULE 9
Six Patents in a Church Archive

MODULE 10
The Only Supply Line Still Open

MODULE 11
A Desert Swamp Where Merv Had Been

MODULE 12
Tarmashirin Abolished the Yasa

Preface and Outline

Front matter · what the study found, how it was built, where it failed, the disciplines it holds itself to, and a map of its fourteen parts

The spine

The largest contiguous land empire in human history was founded by a man who had been left to starve on a river bank as a child, and it came apart, fifty-four years later, because one of his grandsons could not get grain to Karakorum.

Between those two facts sits an order that this collection has not previously had a case for, and four findings carry the study.

The first is that the founding was a constitutional revolution conducted inside one family, and its principal casualties were the founder's own kin. Around 1189 three senior men of the Mongol ruling house — Altan, the last surviving son of a previous khan; Quchar, a senior cousin; Sacha Beki of the Jürkin — agreed among themselves that they would make Temüjin qan. Every one of them outranked him by descent. Within thirteen years he had killed or driven out all four of them, and what he destroyed them for was the exercise of a right their fathers had held without question: the aristocratic power to distribute plunder and to withdraw one's own people. The order that resulted has been read for eight hundred years as a war of unification against outsiders, and the story of vengeance against the Tatars is the natural cover for a conquest whose chief victims were relatives.

The second is that the order solved the problem this framework says has no reliable solution — and solved it for only half of its own elite. In fifty years and four contested successions, not one commander of a thousand or of ten thousand ever made a bid for the throne. No general seized a province, no guard commander installed a puppet, no field army declared for itself. Against the corpus this is nearly unique, and the instruments are legible: commanders appointed rather than acclaimed, units deliberately composed against kinship, officers drawn from men with no independent following, sons held in the khan's household, a guardsman outranking a chiliarch. A man in that position who rebelled would have commanded nobody. **The problem was never capable men. It was eligible men** — and the one answer the founder could not apply to his own sons was the answer that worked.

The third is that almost everything the order needed above the level of the sword, it rented. It had no clergy, no scribes, no administrators, no schools and no published law. It took its alphabet off a captured prisoner, its fiscal system off a Khitan aristocrat educated by the enemy, its accounting off Khwarazmian Muslims, its theology of conquest off a Persian civil servant who supplied it unbidden, and its atrocity literature off the very people it had terrorised, who wrote it at their own expense because their own positions required the calamity to be enormous. The leases were cheap and they worked. What nobody priced was that the leased interpreters would also raise the conquerors' grandchildren — so that within three generations each branch of the family believed what its servants believed, and the empire divided along the lines its nurseries had drawn.

The fourth is that the largest entry in the bill was produced by an absence. The irrigation of Khorasan and lower Iraq did not have to be destroyed. It had only to be un-maintained. A *qanat* is not a building but an activity — a tunnel that silts and collapses unless cleaned by hand every year by men trained to a trade transmitted father to son — and the way to kill it is to kill, deport or scatter the men who clean it, after which the desert takes it back with nobody lifting a tool. Every instrument this framework owns registers commissions: bodies, burned cities, tonnages removed. All of them return a null on the biggest number in the accounting.

How it was built

One module at a time, verification before writing, over the arc the Field Manual sets: a landscape and twelve modules, each with a framework function, each returning a refinement to the framework rather than merely applying it. Each was researched, drafted, presented and confirmed before the next was begun.

The single most productive decision was to obtain Urgunge Onon's translation of the *Secret History of the Mongols* in full and work from the text directly rather than from search results. Four of the study's load-bearing passages — the pre-battle order at Dalan-nemürges, the allotment of the subject people, the blue-book decree, and Ögedei's tax and relay decree with his brother's recorded assent — were read in place, in context, with the surrounding material visible, and two of them turned out to say something other than what the summaries report.

Public-domain primary sources are quoted exactly and at the length the argument needs: the Türk memorial inscriptions of the 730s in Thomsen's rendering, Carpini and Rubruck in Rockhill's 1900 translation, Ibn al-Athir in the older English, and Güyük's letter of November 1246 with its Turkic preamble and its Mongolian-script seal. Modern copyrighted translations — Onon and Boyle above all — are quoted

briefly and credited, and the reader is sent to them. Modern scholarship is paraphrased. Contested figures are given as ranges with the chronicler named and his interest stated, which in this study is nearly every number that matters.

Where the study failed, and where the seed did

Five works that would have changed this study were not read at first hand. Thomas Allsen's *Mongol Imperialism*, which is the foundational treatment of Möngke's reign and of the censuses, is used at second hand throughout Modules 6 and 8 and its absence is exposed in both. Igor de Rachewiltz's commentary volumes on the *Secret History* were not consulted, only his translation at one remove. Peter Jackson's work on inter-Mongol warfare, on which Modules 8 and 10 both turn, is used through summaries. Peter Christensen's *The Decline of Iranshahr* — which is the strongest case against Module 11's metabolic reading, and is stated there at full strength — was read only in précis. And Michal Biran's study of Tarmashirin, on which the closing module's decisive fact rests, is likewise at second hand.

The Persian and Arabic material is all at one remove. Juvayni, Rashid al-Din, Ibn al-Athir and Mustawfi are quoted through translations and reference literature, and no Chinese source was read in any form. A study whose four best documents are Mongol, Turkic, Latin and Persian, and which reads none of those languages, is working through a lens it did not grind.

And two of the seed's principal guesses were broken. The seed held that the decimal organisation of the army was the most important structural fact of the founding; the research found it was ordinary — recorded among the Xiongnu a thousand years earlier and in use by the Khitan and Jurchen in Chinggis's own century — and that the operative clause was not the structure but the prohibition on leaving one's unit. The seed also held that the delay in the empire's fragmentation and its eventual fragility had the same cause; the audit found two different causes applied to two different classes of men, and the study says so on the face of Module 8. A third guess — that a lineage anchor is the worst kind at a succession — is confirmed in part and corrected in the closing module: the anchor supplied the claimants, but what made the claim unsurvivable was a decision taken in 1251.

Where the seed was right it is credited in the module concerned. The Landscape's own prediction — that a founding on the steppe would be built around an anti-exit device rather than a device for gathering men — was made before Module 1 was researched and held when it was, and stands unrevised.

The discipline

Legibility is not pardon.

The peace of the grasslands was real, and the herding families who stopped losing their daughters to raiding parties were not dupes. The Rus' Church's written immunity was real, enforced, and transformative. Ghazan's reforms genuinely raised revenue and genuinely reduced arbitrary exaction. Clergy of four religions drew stipends at one court and none could silence the others; a khan convened a formal doctrinal debate with appointed arbiters and rules against insult; a chronicler in a Mongol-ruled city wrote that the Mongols were worse than the Antichrist and died in his bed. A foundling of an exterminated people became supreme judge of the empire and a blacksmith's son commanded its armies, in a century when birth determined station nearly everywhere on earth.

All of that is set down because it is the mechanism, not the defence. A study that cannot credit what an order actually did has stopped measuring; a study that swallows the order's account of itself has stopped being a study.

Both columns stand. Neither cancels the other. Carrying both at once is the whole of the method.

The arithmetic is laid out. The sum is left to the reader.

The arc

Landscape · The Place Where the Kingdom Is Held Together. A valley that had been an imperial capital three times and was rubble by 1180; the states that managed the grasslands from the south; and what a fatherless boy on the Onon could actually see from where he stood.

1 · Let Us Not Stop for Booty. *The floor of force.* How a man with no army built one that could not disperse, by taking from the steppe aristocracy the two powers that had always made it.

2 · Let No One Alter the Blue Writing. *The settlement.* A division made in households rather than acres, entered in a register that does not survive, and secretly revised by the man who had forbidden its revision.

3 · From the Rising of the Sun to Its Setting. *The robe.* A claim to universal rule addressed to rival sovereigns and to the conquerors' own soldiers — and the doctrine the conquered's clergy then supplied for nothing.

4 · As Soon as They Are Two or Three Years Old. *Formation.* The finest soldiery in the world acquired at no cost because the households were already making it; and

why an order that formed nobody it conquered lost its own grandchildren to the people it ruled.

5 · Four Hundred Craftsmen. *The cost column.* Five men with five different ledgers — and a sorting variable that graded a population by whether the conqueror could reproduce its skill at home.

6 · One Sheep from Every Hundred. *Extraction.* A levy that kept its name for forty years while turning from a whip-round among herdsmen into a head tax in coin on peasants who held none; and the running fight between the men who counted and the men who bid.

7 · I Shrank from Recording It. *Information and suppression.* An order that built the fastest news system in the world to hear with, censored almost nothing, and needed the worst reports of itself to travel and to grow.

8 · A Falconer Found the Camp. *Elite coordination and the default.* The audit, link by link — why the officer corps never fractured and the family always did.

9 · Six Patents in a Church Archive. *Plurality or foreclosure.* An empire in which a blacksmith's son could command ten thousand men and no man alive held a right against the throne, because the law had never been published.

10 · The Only Supply Line Still Open. *Change and collapse.* A pure fracture, with no rising, no conquest and no exhaustion — and a quarrel about whether the Mongols should remain Mongols, settled by which brother could feed an army.

11 · A Desert Swamp Where Merv Had Been. *The grim accounting.* The bill in two columns, and why the largest entry is the one nothing in this framework can register.

12 · Tarmashirin Abolished the Yasa. *Convergence and divergence.* Identical conquerors, one founding, one law, one lineage, set down among four different populations and watched choosing four different answers — and then the strongest case for the whole enterprise, stated at full strength and answered.

LANDSCAPE

The Place Where the Kingdom Is Held Together

Landscape · The two societies on the eve of the founding — a valley that had been an imperial capital three times and was rubble by 1180, the great sedentary states that managed the grasslands from the south, and what a fatherless boy on the Onon could actually see from where he stood

The valley that had been a capital three times

About four hundred kilometres west of the Onon river, where the Orkhon runs north out of the Khangai mountains through some of the best pasture in inner Asia, there stood in the last quarter of the twelfth century a very large ruined city. The Mongols who grazed near it called it Kharbalgas — the black ruins. It had covered something over thirty square kilometres, with walls, watchtowers, stabling, warehousing, quarters set aside for craft and trade, and at the centre palaces, temples and a monastery. It had been sacked and burned in 840 and nobody had lived in it since. Twenty-seven kilometres to the south-south-east, on ground that at that date held nothing in particular, the Mongols would in 1235 build Karakorum.

The ruined city had been called Ordu-Baliq, the city of the court, and it had been the capital of the Uighur qaghanate, which held the eastern steppe from 744 until the Yenisei Kirghiz destroyed it. The Uighurs had built it on the site of an *ördü*, a nomadic camp-capital, that had belonged to the Türk qaghanate they had overthrown; and the Türks in turn had taken the same ground from the Rouran a hundred and ninety years before that. Three imperial orders in succession had chosen the same valley, and the third of them had left a trilingual stone standing in it — Old Uighur, Sogdian and Chinese — recording the military accomplishments of eight qaghans and their adoption of the Manichaean religion, a faith the third Uighur ruler had taken up in 762 or 763 after meeting Manichaean priests while campaigning in Tang China on the Tang emperor's behalf.

This is the first thing to hold about the country the Mongol founding happened in, and it is the opposite of what the phrase "the steppe tribes" invites a reader to assume. There was no aboriginal condition here, no timeless pastoral baseline that a conqueror interrupted. There had been states — large, literate, taxing, city-building, treaty-making states with official religions and permanent capitals and chanceries — and they

had risen on this exact ground and fallen off it, four or five times, over six hundred years. The fragmented, feuding, illiterate steppe of 1180 was not the condition from which such states emerge. It was the condition such states leave behind when they collapse. What a man standing on the Orkhon in 1180 was looking at was not a beginning. It was wreckage, and it was the wreckage of people very like himself.

That matters for a reason that runs through the whole study. Elsewhere in this collection a conqueror arrives and finds a former conquest still running — an order built by violence generations back and since driven so deep by formation that its law and its calendar have become simply the way the world is, so that the newcomer must either capture the machinery or fight the belief. The steppe presented the other case. Here the former conquests had reached that self-running condition and then been destroyed, and what survived them was not a naturalised order but a *repertoire*: a set of working instruments detached from the arrangements that had used them. The title qaghan, supreme over all the tribes. The decimal division of fighting men into tens, hundreds, thousands and ten thousands. The *ordu*, the ruler's household in arms. The sacred centre in the Orkhon valley. The idea that Heaven appoints one man. All of these were lying about, available, uncontested — because nobody held them. An inheritance of tools without an incumbent is a very different endowment from an inheritance of a living order, and it is much cheaper to pick up.

What the stones said, and what nobody could read

Two other stones stood in that same country, sixty kilometres or so north-east of the Uighur ruin, at a place now called Khöshöö Tsaidam. They had been raised in the 730s by the Türk qaghan Bilge for his brother Kül Tegin and then for himself, carved on all four sides in Chinese and in the Old Turkic runiform script, and they contain the most remarkable political document the pre-Mongol steppe produced: an earlier steppe empire's own account, in its own words, of how a steppe empire is built and why it comes apart.

The cosmology is stated in the first lines, and it is the one the Mongols would later be running:

> *"When the blue sky above and the brown earth below were created, between them a human being was created. Over the human beings, my ancestors Bumin Kagan and Istemi Kagan ruled. They ruled people by Turk laws, they led them and succeeded."*

The sacred geography is stated too, and with a specificity that reads less like piety than like a strategic assessment:

> *"The forest of Mount Ötükän has no [foreign] overlord; the forest of Mount Ötükän is the place where the kingdom is held together."*

And then the diagnosis. Bilge's inscription is at bottom a warning to a people he thought was making the same mistake twice, and the mistake has two halves. The first is internal fracture:

> *"Because of want of harmony between the begs and the people, and because of the Chinese people's cunning and craft and its intrigues, and because the younger and the elder brothers chose to take counsel against one another and bring discord between begs and people, they brought the old realm of the Turkic people to dissolution, and brought destruction on its lawful kagans."*

The second is purchase from outside — the sedentary empire buying the steppe aristocracy one man at a time, with goods the steppe could not make:

> *"The Chinese people, who give in abundance gold, silver, millet, and silk, have always used ingratiating words and have at their disposal enervating riches. While ensnaring them with their ingratiating talk and enervating riches, they have drawn the far-dwelling peoples nearer to themselves."*

The consequence, in the inscription's own tally, was that the Türk nobility took Chinese names and Chinese office and served for fifty years, until the common people asked, in the text's phrasing, where their kingdom had gone and which qaghan it was they served.

Set beside what happened afterwards, this is a very exact piece of political analysis. The Türk qaghanate fell in 744 to a coalition of its own subject tribes. The Uighur qaghanate that replaced it fell in 840 to a Kirghiz army let in by a defecting Uighur minister, after a war among its own leaders. Two orders, one diagnosis, both failure modes running as described. The steppe's structural problem had been named, in writing, in the country, four hundred and fifty years before Temüjin was born.

And nobody could read it. The Old Turkic runiform script had gone out of use on the eastern steppe after the Uighur collapse; the writing the Mongols eventually adopted came to them in 1204 from a different alphabet entirely, the Uighur script derived through Sogdian from Aramaic, carried by a captured scribe. The stones stood in the grass, legible to no one grazing sheep beside them. What survived was not the

text but the experience the text described — transmitted the way everything on the steppe was transmitted, by happening again to each generation.

The felt-walled tents: an economy that could not be garrisoned

The people among whom Temüjin was born called themselves, in the phrase the Secret History uses of the population he would eventually rule, the people of the felt-walled tents. The phrase is a description of an economy and it should be read as one.

A household lived off five kinds of animal — sheep, goats, cattle, horses, camels — moved between seasonal pastures on a circuit measured in tens or low hundreds of kilometres, and stored almost nothing. There were no granaries because there was no grain to speak of; there were no walls; there was no fixed place a tax collector could come back to. Wealth was in livestock and in people, both of which walk. Iron, textiles beyond what could be felted, grain, tea and luxuries came from outside — bought, or taken, or received as the price of not taking.

Three structural facts follow, and every steppe order in the record is a set of answers to them.

The first is that a pastoral population cannot be held down by garrisoning, because it is not there to be garrisoned. The ordinary instrument by which an order prices a subject's defection too high to choose — a fort within riding distance, a road, a register, a man who knows where you sleep — assumes the subject can be found. On the steppe the standard response to a superior force was not submission but dispersal: strike the tents, drive the herds, go. This inverts the usual geography of compliance. In a sedentary order the ruler's problem is that his subjects are too numerous to watch; on the steppe the problem is that they are too mobile to hold. Any arrangement that intends to command men here must solve exit before it solves anything else, and that prediction can be made from the landscape alone, before a single instrument of the Mongol founding has been looked at.

The second is that the same mobility makes the population militarily formidable at almost no marginal cost. A herding people is already mounted, already armed for hunting and raiding, already accustomed to co-ordinated movement over distance, and already provisioned by its own migrating food supply. A steppe ruler does not have to build an army out of farmers; he has to persuade or compel an army that already exists to move in one direction. This is why steppe confederations could appear so suddenly and reach such size — and why they could dissolve just as suddenly, since the units that composed them were self-sufficient and lost nothing by going home.

The third is that there is very little to extract internally. A ruler of herdsmen who taxed herdsmen would be taking animals from men who had nothing else, and would

have to keep taking them to stay solvent. The surplus that pays for a steppe state has therefore always had to come from outside — from trade with the sedentary south on favourable terms, from tribute paid by sedentary states to buy peace, or from plunder. Every large steppe order in the record is, in this respect, an extraction machine pointed away from its own people and at somebody else's fields. That is a fact about the position, not about a disposition; a Frankish king with the same balance sheet would have reached the same conclusion.

The states to the south, and the arithmetic between them

South and east of the grasslands, in 1180, lay the world the steppe's surplus had to come from.

The largest and nearest was the Jin, ruled by the Jurchen, a forest and river people out of Manchuria who had themselves been subjects of the Khitan Liao empire until they overthrew it between 1115 and 1122, then drove the Song south of the Huai and took northern China. The Jin held their empire the way the Liao had held theirs, by a dual administration: a Chinese-style bureaucracy for the settled provinces and a separate tribal apparatus for the nomads of inner Asia. Their own census of 1207, as the modern scholarship reads the figures, returned something in the region of 8.4 million households and 53.5 million persons.

To the south-west lay the Tangut kingdom of Xi Xia, smaller, Buddhist, literate in its own invented script, sitting across the trade corridor. Further west again lay the Qara Khitai, founded by Khitan aristocrats who had ridden away from the Jurchen conquest of the Liao and set up a new state in Turkestan under a ruler styled *gurkhan*, universal khan. Beyond them, in Transoxiana and Iran, the Khwarazmian empire was assembling itself out of the wreckage of the Seljuks. Every one of these was a going concern with a treasury, a chancery, and a settled population that could be counted.

Now set the two societies side by side and the central arithmetic of the case appears at once. Estimates of the nomad population of Mongolia around the founding are contested and rest on thin evidence: J. M. Smith's calculation puts it near 675,000 around 1211; a census figure of 723,910 is reported for 1241; other estimates run from four or five hundred thousand up to two and a half million. Take the range at its widest and it remains true that fewer than a million people, and probably nearer seven hundred thousand, lived on the grasslands. The Secret History's own list of the commanders appointed in 1206 implies a fighting force of ninety-five thousand; a cautious modern reading puts it nearer seventy or eighty thousand.

Against that, fifty-odd million in the Jin alone. The ratio is on the order of one to seventy. Whatever explanation the rest of this study arrives at, it must be an explanation

of how the smaller number came to command the larger, and the answer cannot be numbers.

The containment: a policy that worked for sixty years

It also cannot be that the Jin were not paying attention. They were, and their steppe policy was deliberate, articulated, and for a long time successful.

Its three instruments are all attested. The Jin collected tribute from some of the steppe tribes, which bought both revenue and information. They actively encouraged rivalries among them — most consequentially by backing the Tatars, who grazed east and south of the Mongols, against the Mongol confederation that had formed in the early twelfth century under Khabul Khan. And they conducted regular punitive expeditions into the grasslands, enslaving or killing, which had the effect of removing steppe leadership before it could accumulate.

The policy's most famous single act was also its most instructive. Khabul's successor as khan of the Mongols, Ambaghai, was seized by Tatars while personally escorting his daughter to her betrothal, handed over to the Jin court, and executed on the order of the Jin emperor Xizong by being nailed to a wooden mule. The Secret History preserves the message the tradition says he sent back from captivity — a warning never to take a daughter to her bridegroom in person, and an instruction to his kin to keep striving for vengeance until the nails of their five fingers were ground down and their ten fingers worn away. His successor Qutula, elected at a great assembly in the Khorkhonagh valley, is said to have fought the Tatars thirteen times and never got satisfaction.

Read structurally rather than as an atrocity story, this is a containment policy operating exactly as designed, and it worked. Between the Jin–Tatar defeat of the Mongols in the 1160s and the last decades of the century there was no unified power on the eastern steppe. The Mongol confederation had come apart. The Tatars, the Kereit, the Naiman, the Merkit and the Mongols raided each other, took each other's women and herds, and made and broke coalitions, in a condition the Secret History renders in a famous piece of verse — the starry heaven turning about, the many peoples at strife, nobody entering his own bed, everyone spoiling everyone else, the crusted earth turning back and forth.

The important analytic point is that this condition was not the natural state of the country. It was a policy outcome, purchased and maintained from Zhongdu, at a cost the Jin were willing to pay because the alternative had been demonstrated twice within living memory of the archives. And it follows that the founding this study is about is legible, in part, as the failure of somebody else's containment strategy — with the

qualification that a policy which held for sixty years is not a stupid policy, and that the mechanism of its failure needs to be dated and named rather than assumed. The dating begins in 1196, and it will be taken up shortly.

Three ways to bind a man, and the defect in all of them

Between the collapse of the qaghanates and the founding, the steppe still had to co-ordinate somehow. What it had were three ways of binding one man to another, and their common defect is the thing the founding was built to correct.

The first was *anda*: sworn brotherhood between two men, entered into voluntarily, sealed with an exchange of gifts and a shared oath. The second was *nökör*: personal companionship, a free man attaching himself to a leader for as long as it suited him — retinue rather than subjection, and the leader's following was simply the sum of such attachments. The third was *quda*: marriage alliance between lineages, which turned two groups into in-laws and gave each a standing claim on the other.

The Secret History gives the *quda* system its own manifesto, in the speech it puts in the mouth of Dei Sechen of the Onggirat when Yesügei brings the nine-year-old Temüjin looking for a bride. The Onggirat, he says, do not strive for dominion or for peoples; they raise beautiful daughters, seat them beside the ruler on the throne, and let their daughters be their intercessors — one has only to look at their beauty. It is worth pausing on what that is. It is a small people's deliberate, articulated, transmitted strategy for surviving among larger armed neighbours by making itself the supplier of queens: an alternative to force that works precisely because everyone around it wants force. It is also, from the other side, an admission of what marriage alliance was for.

All three instruments share one property, and it is fatal to any order built on them: they bind persons, not positions, and they can be withdrawn. An *anda* can break his oath. A *nökör* can ride away in the night to a leader who is winning. A *quda* alliance dissolves the moment the interests behind it diverge. Every steppe confederation before 1206 was assembled from these materials, which is exactly why every steppe confederation before 1206 came apart when its assembling personality died — the bonds were with him, and there was nothing underneath them.

Anyone in that world who wanted an arrangement that outlasted him had therefore to solve a single problem: how to bind a man to a structure rather than to a face. That problem was visible. Nobody needed a theory to see it; it happened to everyone, repeatedly, in their own lifetimes.

The empty cost column

Set against that landscape, the recorded childhood of Temüjin reads as something more useful than a hard-luck story. It reads as a systematic education in what happens where nobody can be made to pay.

The tradition's sequence, as the Secret History gives it, is this. His father Yesügei took his mother Hö'elün by carrying her off from another man, a Merkit, who fled rather than fight three riders. Yesügei was later recognised by Tatars at a feast on the road, given poison, and died of it. His widow and her small children were then abandoned on the Onon by the Tayichi'ud, the leading lineage of their own confederation, and left to live on roots, wild onions and small fish. Some years later the Merkit came for Hö'elün's debt and carried off Temüjin's own wife Börte, and the recovery required assembling an alliance and a campaign. At some point in between he was taken by the Tayichi'ud and held in a wooden cangue, and got out of it by hitting a guard on the head and running.

The Secret History is a lineage's account of its own rise, composed within a generation or two for the family it exists to justify, and it must be used for what the tradition held rather than for what happened; several of these episodes are shaped, and one of them — the killing of his half-brother Bekter over a stolen fish and a stolen lark — is preserved for reasons that are not flattering and are therefore probably not invented. But the structural fact the sequence encodes does not depend on any individual episode being true as told, because it is independently visible in the landscape: there was, on the steppe of the 1170s and 1180s, no power that could keep an account against anybody. No court, no register, no standing force, no sanction that reached beyond the arm of the injured party and his kin. A man's protection was exactly as large as the number of men who would ride for him that week, and the men who would ride for him were bound by oaths they were free to break.

That is the condition this framework calls an empty cost column, and it is worth being precise about who it is empty *for*. It is empty for the strong. A cost bears on a decision only where a credible power will impose it and the actor believes it will fall; where no such power exists, the powerful do as they please and the weak absorb it. The Tayichi'ud abandoned a widow and four small children and paid nothing, because there was nobody to charge them. The Merkit took another man's wife and paid nothing until a coalition was assembled to make them pay, which took time, allies and a war.

The reading to carry forward is not that a traumatised boy grew up vengeful. It is narrower and more useful: a man who spent his formative years on the receiving end of an empty cost column learned, in the most direct way available, exactly what the

absence of a credible enforcer costs and exactly which bonds fail under strain. When such a man later builds — and the instruments of the order he built are, almost without exception, instruments for making a cost fall reliably on a man who defects — the continuity is not psychological but positional. He had been shown the problem from underneath.

The field of the visible from the Onon

The framework's method insists that before you ask what a man wanted or feared, you ask what he could see; that a position hands out an epistemology before it hands out a menu; and that the edge of a man's field feels, from inside it, like the edge of the world. Applied here, the question is not what Temüjin invented. It is what a man in his particular seat, in the two decades before 1206, could actually look at — and his seat turns out to have been unusually well placed.

He could see, first, a functioning steppe court with a foreign clergy in it. The Kereit, on the Tuul river, were the strongest single power in central Mongolia, and their ruling house was Christian — Nestorian, of the Church of the East, a faith that had reached the grasslands along the Silk Road generations earlier and taken among the Kereit, the Naiman and the Ongut. Their khan To'oril had been Yesügei's *anda*, became Temüjin's patron, and had himself spent time in exile at the court of the Qara Khitai in Turkestan before returning. Here was a steppe ruler who had been abroad, who patronised a literate priesthood, and whose title had been ratified by an emperor.

He could see, second, an actual state apparatus operating on the steppe in his own language-world. The Naiman, in the west, ran a chancery on the Uighur model. When Temüjin destroyed them in 1204, his men picked up a fleeing official carrying a seal under his clothes. The man was Tata-tonga, an Uighur, keeper of the seals to the Naiman Tayang Khan. Asked what the seal was for, he explained — the account is in his official biography in the Yuan dynastic history — that when a representative of the khan went out to collect taxes, he carried documents bearing that seal to certify that he was authorised to do it. Tata-tonga was not a court ornament; he was a scribe and a tax official, keeping records in Uighur script. He was kept on, made keeper of Temüjin's seals, and set to teaching the script to the sons of the Mongol nobility.

Consider what that single episode contains. A writing system, a chancery, an archive, a seal, and above all the concept of a *warrant* — the idea that a man's authority to take your animals derives not from his being personally frightening but from a piece of paper certified by an absent ruler. That is the elementary building block of impersonal administration, and it did not have to be fetched from China. It arrived on horseback, in the person of a prisoner, from the next valley.

He could see, third, the Jin — and not as a rumour. In 1196 the Jin, pursuing the containment policy described above by its usual method of backing one steppe power against another, mounted a campaign against the Tatars and called in To'oril and Temüjin to hit them from the north while the Jin commander Wanyan Xiang came up from the south-east. Both steppe leaders met Wanyan Xiang in person. For their service, To'oril was given the Chinese title *wang*, prince — which in Mongol mouths became Ong, and is why he is remembered as Ong Khan — and Temüjin was given the rank *ja'ut quri*, something like a frontier commander. For a period, in other words, the future Chinggis Khan held a commission from the Jin empire and had stood in the presence of its field command.

He could see, fourth, the decimal organisation of fighting men, because it was ordinary. Han-dynasty writers had recorded it among the Xiongnu more than a thousand years earlier; the Khitan and the Jurchen were both using it in his own century. Tens, hundreds, thousands and ten thousands, each with a commander answering to the level above, was not an insight waiting to be had. It was the standard furniture of steppe and frontier armies, and everyone who had ever campaigned had seen it.

That is the menu, and it is worth being blunt about the shape of it, because the point is easy to lose. The instruments of the Mongol founding were not discovered. They were lying about — some of them in ruins in the Orkhon valley, some in the Naiman chancery, some in the Jin order of battle, some in the practice of every raiding party on the steppe. What a position gave Temüjin was not genius and not information nobody else had; it was an unusually wide field of view for a man of his rank, assembled by accident out of a client relationship with a Christian khan who had travelled, a commission from a Chinese-style empire, and the capture of a literate western court.

And the immediate corollary is the check that keeps this from becoming determinism. Others stood in comparable positions and answered differently. Jamukha — Temüjin's *anda*, his rival, and by every account a formidable man — was elected in 1201 by a coalition of thirteen tribal leaders and took the title *gur khan*, universal khan. That title, too, was borrowed off the menu: it was what the rulers of the Qara Khitai called themselves. Jamukha saw the same steppe, reached for the same kind of instrument, and built a confederation of tribal chiefs who kept their tribes — which is to say he built the arrangement the steppe had always built, and it dissolved in the way the steppe's arrangements always dissolved. Two men, similar fields, opposite answers. Position lights the logic; it does not dictate the choice, and a study that forgets this is writing fate rather than history.

What was not in the field

The honest half of a field-of-the-visible reconstruction is the part that is missing, and here it is very large.

Nothing in Temüjin's position before 1206 gave him any usable picture of Transoxiana, Khorasan, the Rus' principalities, the Caucasus, the Hungarian plain or the Levant. He is unlikely to have had any working notion of how many people lived in a city like Merv or Nishapur, or of what a *qanat* was, or of what maintaining one cost, or of what happens to an irrigated agriculture when the men who maintain it are killed. The furthest west anyone in his circle had been was the Qara Khitai court, and that knowledge was one man's and second-hand.

This has consequences for how the rest of the study must read the record. The scale of what followed was not planned on the Onon. Nobody at the assembly of 1206 was designing a Eurasian empire, because a Eurasian empire was not a thing anyone present had the materials to conceive; the campaigns went where they went by a sequence of decisions each of which was taken with what was known at the time. The analyst, who can see the whole board with the outcomes filled in, must keep refusing to price these decisions against a map no participant had. That refusal is a discipline and not a courtesy, and it cuts in both directions: it forbids crediting foresight that was not available, and it equally forbids convicting a man of not foreseeing a catastrophe that had not yet been invented.

What can be measured, and what this study will measure, is the distance between what the sources show a man could see and what he actually built out of it. That distance is where the real information is. A copied instrument never comes out looking like its model, and the deviation is not a botch; it is a readout of the local situation, because it shows what the builder had to hand, what he could not use, and what problem he was actually solving. The decimal system was on the menu for everyone. Whether the units it made were filled with kinsmen or deliberately mixed, and whether a man could leave one, is the finding.

Reading the landscape against the framework

Three refinements, offered as contributions rather than applications.

First: the recursion has two forms, and they are different endowments. This collection's usual finding is that a conqueror never meets a baseline — that the order he finds is itself an older conquest naturalised over generations until it feels to everyone inside it like the shape of the world, which is why a conqueror who wants it cheap must capture its machinery rather than argue with its belief. That is one form. The eastern

steppe presents the other. Here the former conquests had reached exactly that self-running condition and had then been *destroyed*, and what the twelfth century inherited was not a naturalised order but a stock of detached instruments — a vacant supreme title, a decimal army structure, a sacred valley, a Heaven that appoints, a script two valleys away — with no incumbent attached to any of them. The framework should hold the distinction, because it predicts opposite behaviour: a conqueror facing a living naturalised order buys or captures the men who run it and inherits their warrant along with their apparatus, while a conqueror facing a ruined one picks the instruments up free and must supply the warrant himself. The second is cheaper in acquisition and dearer in legitimation, and the study should expect a heavy investment in legitimation downstream.

Second: a vacant seat is not an inheritance; it is a claim. The sharpest question this framework asks of any conquest is whether the order being taken had pooled its coordination into a position a stranger could occupy — whether there was, in plain terms, somebody with the standing to deliver the country, and a seat he sat in. The steppe answers neither yes nor no. There *was* such a position; the qaghanate had existed and everyone knew what it was. But it had been empty since 840, and an empty position confers nothing on the man who claims it. He cannot simply sit down and start issuing orders through a machine that is already running, because there is no machine; he must fight every rival claimant, build the apparatus, and then persuade people that the thing he built is the thing the old word named. The corpus should carry this as a third case beside the occupied seat and the absent one: **the vacant seat, which supplies a conqueror with a vocabulary and a precedent and not one man, one soldier or one tax record.** Its diagnostic tell should be a founding that is unusually preoccupied with naming — with titles, formulas, and the assertion of continuity with a predecessor nobody alive remembers.

Third, and most useful for what follows: on the steppe the ordinary compliance problem is inverted, and the founding instrument can be predicted from that alone. This framework's default account of how the ruled are held has force reaching a subject who cannot get away from it, and treats visible surveillance as the tell of a belief that never took. A pastoral economy voids the first half of that. The subject can get away; dispersal is not rebellion but the routine response to pressure, and it costs him almost nothing because his house, his food and his wealth all travel with him. So the central problem of a steppe order is not extracting obedience from a captive population but *preventing exit* — and the framework's usual instruments for pricing defection are unavailable, because they presuppose a man who can be found.

That yields a prediction, made here before the founding is examined, and it is the most testable thing in this landscape: the founding instrument of the Mongol order will not principally be a device for gathering men, since gathering men was the one thing the steppe had always managed. It will be a device for **making them unable to leave**, and for making the bond run to a position rather than to a person, because personal bonds that could be withdrawn were precisely what had dissolved every previous confederation on this ground. If that is right, the decisive fact of the founding will not be the size of the army but the rule governing transfer between its units, and the price of leaving one.

A note on sources.

The quotations from the Türk memorial inscriptions at Khöshöö Tsaidam are given in E. Denison Ross's English rendering of Vilhelm Thomsen's final Danish translation, published in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* in 1930 and now in the public domain; the opening cosmological lines ("When the blue sky above and the brown earth below were created…") are as reproduced in the standard English presentations of the Kül Tegin stele. The monuments were raised in the 730s, discovered by Yadrintsev's expedition in 1889, published by Radlov, and deciphered by Thomsen in 1893. The Karabalgasun inscription is trilingual in Old Uighur, Sogdian and Chinese and is attributed to the reign of Baoyi Qaghan (808–821).

The *Secret History of the Mongols* is a Middle Mongolian text of the thirteenth century whose original is in the public domain but which survives only in Chinese transcription; the English renderings referred to here — Ambaghai's message, Dei Sechen's speech on the Onggirat strategy, the verse on the turning starry heaven, the phrase "the people of the felt-walled tents" — are modern scholarly translations (chiefly Igor de Rachewiltz's, with the older literal renderings and Paul Kahn's adaptation of Francis Woodman Cleaves consulted). They are therefore given in brief paraphrase or short phrase rather than quoted at length, and the reader should go to de Rachewiltz's edition for the text. The Secret History is used throughout for what the imperial tradition held about the founding, not as an independent record of events, in line with the standing caution that it was composed within a generation or two for the family it exists to justify.

Ordu-Baliq's dimensions, its construction on the earlier Türk site, its destruction by the Yenisei Kirghiz in 840 and its distance from the later Karakorum are as reported in the archaeological and encyclopaedic literature. The Uighur adoption of Manichaeism under Bögü Qaghan in 762–763, during a campaign undertaken with the Tang, is

standard. The Liao and Jin dual-administration system is as described in the standard reference literature.

On Jin steppe policy — tribute from some tribes, the deliberate encouragement of rivalries, regular punitive expeditions that enslaved or killed, the backing of the Tatars against the Mongol confederation of Khabul Khan, and the execution of Ambaghai by nailing to a wooden mule on the order of Emperor Xizong — the account follows the standard secondary literature on the Mongol–Jin war. The 1196 Tatar campaign, the meeting with the Jin commander Wanyan Xiang, To'oril's title *wang* (Ong) and Temüjin's rank of *ja'ut quri* are attested in both the Mongol imperial sources and the Chinese record and are given here as the modern scholarship reports them.

Tata-tonga's capture in 1204, his position as seal-keeper to the Naiman Tayang Khan, his explanation of the seal's function in certifying a tax collector's warrant (from his biography in the *Yuan shi*), and his subsequent appointment and teaching of the Uighur script to Mongol nobles, are drawn from the imperial sources as summarised in the scholarship on writing in the Mongol empire. Nestorian Christianity among the Kereit, Naiman and Ongut ruling houses is well attested; the caution registered by John of Plano Carpini, that the conversion of leading families did not mean the conversion of whole peoples, is retained here.

The decimal organisation is recorded among the Xiongnu by Han-dynasty writers and was in use by the Khitan and Jurchen before the Mongol founding; it is not a Mongol invention, and this study treats the claim that it was as an error to be corrected rather than a premise.

Population figures are contested and are given as ranges. The Jin census of 1207 is reported in the modern literature at approximately 8.4 million households and 53.5 million persons; the earlier Jin census of 1187 at approximately 6.8 million households and 44.7 million persons. For the steppe, J. M. Smith's estimate ("Mongol Manpower and Persian Population," *JESHO* 18, 1975) puts the nomad population of Outer Mongolia near 675,000 around 1211, and a census figure of 723,910 is reported for 1241; other estimates run from four or five hundred thousand to two and a half million. The Secret History's list of the commanders appointed in 1206 implies about ninety-five thousand troops; Leo de Hartog's lower reading of seventy to eighty thousand is noted, and Timothy May's judgement that the ninety-five thousand figure is the only creditable one is registered against it. None of these numbers is a count and none should be treated as one.

Modern scholarship consulted for the framing of the pre-imperial steppe — on the decimal *minghan* as a joint military and administrative unit including households rather than only fighting men, on the Jin containment policy, and on the "missing

years" of Temüjin's career between 1186 and 1196 — is paraphrased and credited rather than quoted.

MODULE 1

Let Us Not Stop for Booty

Module 1 · The Floor of Force — how a man who began with nothing built an army that could not disperse, by taking from the steppe aristocracy the two powers that had always made it: the right to distribute plunder and the right to walk away with its own followers

What a steppe army was, and why it always came apart

Before 1206 the armed force of any leader on the eastern grasslands was an aggregate of other men's followings. A great man had his own household in arms and his personal companions, the *nökör*, who had attached themselves to him voluntarily; beyond that he had aristocrats who brought their own people. A camp was a *küriyen*, a circle of tents around its lord's, and the circle moved and fought as a body because its members were kin to one another and to him. When a confederation assembled, what assembled was a number of these circles, each intact, each commanded by the man whose blood entitled him to command it.

Two consequences followed, and they are the whole of why steppe confederations were famously enormous and famously short-lived. The first is that the leader's power over any given thousand men ran through the aristocrat who owned them. He could not promote inside another man's following, could not punish inside it, and could not prevent its owner from taking it home. The second is that the aristocrat's own hold on his people rested on delivering — on plunder, distributed by him, in the customary way, which is to say that a great part of a lord's authority consisted of the right to hand out what had been taken.

The Secret History records, without comment, the arrangement that put Temüjin at the head of such a body. Around 1189 three senior men of the Mongol ruling kin — Altan, the son of Qutula Khan; Quchar, the son of Yesügei's elder brother; and Sacha Beki of the Jürkin, with his brother Taichu — agreed among themselves and told him they would make him qan. Every one of them was his senior. Altan in particular was the last surviving son of a previous khan and had the better claim by descent; his standing aside is what made the election possible. Temüjin did not seize the position. He was handed it by the aristocracy on terms, in the only way the steppe knew how to confer anything, and the terms were the customary ones: he led, and they kept their people.

Within thirteen years he had killed or driven out all four of them, and the sequence by which he did it is the founding of the order.

"Let us not stop for booty"

In the Year of the Dog, 1202, Temüjin moved against the four Tatar peoples at Dalan-nemürges. Before the armies met, he issued an order about what was to happen afterwards. The Secret History gives it in the form of a speech, and its wording is the hinge of this whole study:

> *"If we triumph over the enemy, let us not stop for booty. When we have completed our victory, will the booty not be ours? ... [Then] we will divide it among ourselves. If the enemy forces us to retreat, let us return to the place from where we began our attack. Those who do not do so will be executed."*

Read that as an administrative instrument rather than as a battle order and it does three separate things at once. It forbids private acquisition during the fighting, which makes the pursuit complete instead of dissolving into a scramble the moment the enemy line breaks. It reserves distribution to the centre — *we will divide it among ourselves*, afterwards, by decision. And it attaches death to a rally point, which converts a rout into a manoeuvre.

The first two of these are attacks on the aristocratic order, and they were understood as such immediately. The Tatars were beaten and their leading peoples destroyed. Three men had ignored the order and stopped for plunder in the abandoned camps: Altan, Quchar and Daritai — that is, the senior kinsman who had ceded the khanship, another senior cousin, and Temüjin's own paternal uncle. What they had done was not, by any steppe standard, a crime. It was what lords did. Temüjin sent two commanders, Jebe and Qubilai, to take back from them everything they had taken — the horse herds, the goods, all of it.

Altan and Quchar left. Rashid al-Din says the confiscation is what drove them to Ong Khan, and they were later among the men who conspired against both him and Temüjin, and ended by going over to the Naiman.

This is the module's central fact and it should be stated plainly, because it inverts the usual picture of the founding. Temüjin did not build his floor by being more ruthless toward his enemies than other steppe leaders — the record does not support that, and the Tatars had done as much to his family. He built it by accepting, knowingly, a very large cost at the top: he broke the customary right of aristocratic self-distribution, and it cost him the three men whose concession had made him khan in the first place. He

had done the same thing earlier, and more finally, to the fourth: when Sacha Beki and Taichu of the Jürkin raided his camp while he was away campaigning, he pursued them, took them, and had them executed.

A man who already holds force and then *spends* a great deal of it destroying his own senior kinsmen has revealed what he thought the binding constraint was. It was not the Tatars. It was the aristocracy's two customary powers — to distribute and to withdraw — and everything that follows in the founding is an attack on one or the other.

The linchpin

After the Tatars were beaten, the ruling kin met in a single tent to decide what to do with the surviving Tatar people. The Secret History reports the decision in the collective voice of the council:

> *"Let them be killed. We will measure them against a linchpin and kill off [those who are taller than the linchpin] until all have died. We will make slaves of the survivors. We will divide them among ourselves, some here, some there."*

The linchpin is the pin at the end of a cart axle, roughly the height of a small child. Captured males were walked past a wagon wheel and those whose heads cleared the pin were killed. The measure was not kept secret for long: Belgütei, Temüjin's half-brother, was asked on the way out of the tent what had been decided and told the truth, the Tatars barricaded themselves, and the killing cost the Mongols heavily. Belgütei was thereafter excluded from council.

It is important not to soften this and equally important not to stop at horror, because the operation has a legible structure and the structure is what the rest of the order runs on. Killing the adult males removed the population capable of forming a revenge coalition — the very mechanism that had kept the steppe in motion for two generations, since a defeated people that retained its men retained its capacity to come back. But the survivors were not held as a subject people. They were *divided among ourselves, some here, some there*: distributed as individuals into Mongol households across the whole confederation. Tatar women went into the ruling family itself — Temüjin took two daughters of a Tatar chief as wives — and Tatar children were raised in Mongol tents, some of them by his own mother.

What was destroyed, in other words, was not the Tatars as persons but the Tatars as a unit of political action. The people continued; the thing that could act, decide, feud and secede did not. That is precisely the operation the decimal reorganisation would

shortly perform on every people on the steppe, including the victors, and here it was done first with the sword.

The assembly at the source of the Onon

In the Year of the Tiger, 1206, with the Kereit broken, the Naiman broken, the Merkit scattered and Jamukha dead, the peoples of the grasslands assembled where the Onon rises. The Secret History records the moment in a single sentence whose flatness is part of its authority:

> *"And so, when the people of the felt walled tents had been brought to allegiance, the year of the tiger they all gathered at the source of the Onan river. They hoisted the white standard with nine tails and there they gave Chinggis Qa'an the title of Qan."*

The white standard of nine tails, the *tuq*, was made of horse hair on a pole and was the physical seat of the ruler's fortune. The title was conferred, according to Rashid al-Din, by the shaman Kököchü, known as Teb Tenggeri, the spokesman of Heaven — who declared that all the rulers of the earth had been subdued and that by Heaven's decree Temüjin's name should be Chinggis. The Secret History places a similar naming much earlier, around 1189, but the other imperial traditions — Rashid al-Din, the Veritable Record, the *Shengwu qinzheng lu*, the *Yuan shi* — put it in 1206, and the Secret History appears simply to have collapsed two enthronements into one.

Two features of this deserve attention. The first is that the acclamation was, formally, exactly what the steppe had always done: an assembly of the great, a standard raised, a title conferred. In 1201 Jamukha had been elected in the same way by thirteen tribal leaders and given the title *gur khan*, universal ruler. Nothing about the ceremony announced a new kind of order.

The second is that everything the assembly then did was a repudiation of the arrangement the ceremony belonged to.

Ninety-five appointments

What the assembly of 1206 produced was not a coalition of allies but a list. The Secret History enumerates the commanders of a thousand appointed at the founding — ninety-five of them, named — and the enumeration is the constitution of the new order in its plainest form, because the operative fact about every man on it is that he was *appointed*.

The steppe way had been that a man commanded those who were his by blood or by voluntary attachment. Now a man commanded a thousand households because Chinggis had said so, and he commanded whichever thousand households Chinggis had assigned him. The units were filled deliberately across the old lines: men of the broken Tatars, Kereit, Naiman and Merkit distributed among units so that no *minghan* was a tribe wearing a new name. Whole peoples that had submitted intact were, in a small number of cases, kept together and given to a commander; the general rule ran the other way.

Who the commanders were is the second half of the point. Bo'orchu, who had ridden with Temüjin as a boy to recover stolen horses. Muqali, of the Jalayir, a people that had been in servile dependence. Jelme and his kinsman Sübe'edei of the Uriangqai, whom the tradition makes the sons of a blacksmith. And Jebe — the tradition says he was an archer of the Tayichi'ud who at Köyiten shot Temüjin's horse in the neck, then came in after the defeat and admitted it to his face, and was pardoned, given the name Jebe, and made a commander. Shigi Qutuqu, a Tatar foundling raised by Hö'elün, was made supreme judge and given authority to record decisions in writing.

Set that list beside Altan, Quchar and Sacha Beki. The men who commanded the army of 1206 were, with few exceptions, men whose entire standing came from the man who appointed them and who had no independent following to take away. That is not a meritocratic sentiment. It is a structural preference for officers who cannot leave with anything.

The rule that turned an army into a floor

The decimal division itself — tens, hundreds, thousands, ten thousands — was, as everyone in the country knew, ordinary. The Han histories record it among the Xiongnu; the Khitan and the Jurchen were running it in the same century. A *minghan* was not merely a regiment: it was a thousand *households*, which supplied and equipped the men who fought and were themselves administered and taxed as the unit.

What was not ordinary was the rule attached to it. A man could not transfer from the unit he had been assigned to. He could not seek another commander, and no commander could receive him. The prohibition on movement between the thousands is attested in the scholarship as enforced law, and the same rule reappears when the steppe is reorganised twice more on the same model — by Dayan Khan in 1510 and by the Qing in the mid-seventeenth century — which is the strongest kind of evidence that it was the operative clause, because it is the clause a later conqueror facing the identical problem thought worth copying.

Here the study must be exact about what it can and cannot show, because this is the point at which the Mongol case is habitually over-claimed. There is no surviving Mongol law code. The "Great Yasa" of Chinggis Khan, long treated as a written statute promulgated at the 1206 assembly, does not survive in any form and very probably never existed as a single text: David Ayalon demonstrated that the most-quoted account, Maqrizi's, was lifted without acknowledgement from al-Umari and through him from Juvayni, so that Juvayni is very nearly our only source for its contents, and the word *jasaq* in the thirteenth-century material means a decree or an order rather than a code. So what we have for the transfer prohibition is not a statute we can quote but a practice reported by those who observed the empire working, corroborated by the two later steppe reorganisations that reproduced it. That is weaker evidence than a text and stronger evidence than an inference, and it should be held at that weight.

Underneath the prohibition sat two further arrangements that made it bite. Each unit was allocated pasture, so that a man's thousand was also his address — the one thing a nomad had never had. And responsibility ran collectively within the unit of ten, so that a man's flight was his nine comrades' problem before it was the khan's.

Put those together and the founding instrument comes into focus, and it is exactly what the shape of the country predicted. It is not principally a device for gathering men; gathering men was the one thing the steppe had never had trouble with. It is a device for making a man unable to leave, and for making his bond run to a position — a numbered unit with an appointed commander — rather than to a face that could be followed or abandoned. The three old bonds of the grasslands, sworn brotherhood, personal companionship and marriage alliance, had all been voluntary and all had failed under strain. This one was not voluntary, and the penalty for testing it was death.

The guard

At the same assembly the personal guard was enlarged from a household detachment — the tradition remembers seventy day guards and eighty night guards in the early years — to ten thousand men: one thousand quiver-bearers, one thousand night guards, and eight thousand day guards.

The recruitment rule is the interesting part, and it is preserved in the imperial record. The guard was to be filled from the sons and younger brothers of the commanders of tens, hundreds, thousands and ten thousands, each of whom was to arrive with a stated number of companions and a brother — more companions the higher his father's command. Merit and physical quality were also grounds for entry, and men of no birth at all were taken.

That single instrument does four jobs simultaneously, and it is the most economical thing in the whole founding.

It is a hostage system: every commander in the army had a son in the khan's tent, and the arrangement was constructed so that the nobility experienced this as an honour rather than as a surety, which is what a hostage system looks like when it is working properly.

It is a staff college: guardsmen served in rotation, learned the running of the household and the army from inside, and were the pool from which commanders of thousands and ten thousands were subsequently drawn. The empire's officer corps was manufactured in the same building that held its collateral.

It is a counterweight: a member of the guard outranked a commander of a thousand in the field army, and the ordinary guardsman's standing and pay were above a chiliarch's. A commander who wished to lean on his own men had, standing beside him, a young man who was formally his superior and whose loyalty ran directly to the centre.

And it is a household force of ten thousand answerable to nobody else — which, against an army of ninety-five thousand divided among ninety-five appointed commanders, is a decisive concentration.

The problem that has no standard solution in any order — that a centre needs capable men to exist, and capable men are precisely those able to replace it — was here answered at the founding rather than improvised later, and answered with an instrument that made the answer feel like a promotion.

What the force actually was

The army that came out of this had almost no fixed costs, and that fact governs everything downstream.

There was no pay. A man served because every male between roughly fourteen and sixty was liable, brought his own horses, bow and equipment, and was maintained by the household that his unit was built around. What he received was a share of what was taken, distributed after the fact by decision of the centre, with the share of a man killed going to his family and to the orphans. There was, in the developed system, a body charged with seeing the division done correctly.

There was no supply train in the ordinary sense. The column moved on its horses — the campaign records vary from two remounts a man to eighteen, and most historians settle near five or six — with the herds and carts and families following separately as the *a'urugh*. Men lived on milk products, on the animals themselves, and on what the country yielded.

The weapon was the composite recurve bow, shot from the saddle with a thumb ring, outranging what most opponents carried; men also carried lance, sword, mace and lasso, and the heavier cavalry wore lamellar armour, as often did the horses.

Training was the annual great hunt, the *nerge*: seven men in ten summoned with their arms, deployed as right wing, left wing and centre, driving game across an enormous front into a closing ring over days or weeks, with the kill counted and shared. It is a wheeling manoeuvre by tens of thousands of men over hundreds of kilometres, conducted every winter, in which a commander's competence is visible to the khan and a unit's discipline is tested without anyone being killed. No sedentary state could have afforded it. This one got it as a by-product of how its people already lived.

The consequence is a floor that is nearly free to hold and impossible to keep still. An army with no pay and no commissariat cannot be maintained in idleness, because the thing that maintains it is the taking. The founding therefore built in, at the level of the balance sheet and before any doctrine had been formulated, a requirement that the frontier keep moving.

Who could not leave, and why

Return to the problem the landscape set. A pastoral population cannot be garrisoned. There is no fort within riding distance of a man who has no fixed distance, no register that survives his moving camp, nothing to besiege. On the steppe the standard answer to superior force had always been dispersal, and dispersal cost almost nothing.

The reorganisation of 1206 attacked this at two levels. At the household level it supplied the missing address — a numbered unit, an allocated pasture, an appointed commander, nine comrades liable for one's absence, a son in the guard. At the level of the men who mattered it did something else and more important, and this is the finding this module contributes.

It closed the market in defectors.

The whole efficacy of the old voluntary bonds had depended on there being somewhere else to go. A *nökör* could ride away in the night because a rival lord would take him; an aristocrat could withdraw his people because another confederation would receive them; Altan and Quchar, stripped of their plunder, went to Ong Khan and then to the Naiman, and their doing so was neither remarkable nor difficult. What the destruction of the Tatars, the Kereit, the Naiman and the Merkit accomplished — beyond vengeance, beyond plunder — was the elimination of every legitimate destination on the grasslands. After 1206 a man who left his thousand was not

transferring his allegiance. He was simply a man alone on the steppe, and there was no longer anyone whose acceptance of him would make him anything else.

The fate of Jamukha makes the point exactly, and the Mongol tradition preserves it as a lesson rather than as an embarrassment. When his position collapsed, his own companions seized him and delivered him to Chinggis, expecting reward. Chinggis had them executed for laying hands on their own lord and gave Jamukha the death he asked for. The message that transaction sends to every commander in the new army is not mercy. It is that betrayal has been abolished as a career, because the only man who could have bought it has announced that he will not.

This is worth stating as a general proposition, because it applies wherever a ruler faces subjects he cannot physically hold: **where exit cannot be blocked, it can be made worthless, by acquiring a monopoly on the destinations.** A cost falls on a man only where an enforcer can credibly reach him — but a floor can be built either by extending the reach or by closing the places the reach does not cover. The second is what happened here.

And it carries a liability that should be recorded now, because it will come due. A floor of that construction is stable only while the monopoly holds. It does not depend on walls, which stay standing, or on garrisons, which stay garrisoned. It depends on there being nowhere legitimate to go — and the moment a *legitimate* alternative destination appears inside the order itself, every cost column in it empties at once, not gradually. An order that has abolished the market in defectors has also arranged that the day the market reopens, it reopens everywhere simultaneously.

The legend and what it covers

The Secret History opens by declaring that Chinggis Qahan was born with his destiny ordained by Heaven above, descended from a blue-grey wolf and a fallow doe who crossed the sea and settled at the source of the Onon by Burqan Qaldun; and it has him born clutching in his right fist a clot of blood the size of a knucklebone. The founding is told as vengeance sanctioned from above — for Ambaghai on the wooden mule, for Yesügei poisoned on the road, for Börte carried off — completed by a man Heaven had marked.

Every part of that is doing work, and what it covers is not principally the Tatars, whose destruction the text describes in full and without apology. What it covers is that the first, most sustained and most consequential violence of the founding was directed at the Mongol aristocracy itself. Sacha Beki and Taichu of the Jürkin, executed. Altan and Quchar, stripped and driven into the arms of the enemy and eventually killed. Daritai, an uncle, forced to submit. Jamukha, the sworn brother, put to death. The

senior kin who had made Temüjin khan in the customary way were, without exception, destroyed by the order he built out of the position they gave him — and the aristocratic right they were destroyed for exercising was the right their fathers had held without question.

A story of vengeance against outsiders, told from inside the family that won, is the natural cover for a conquest whose principal casualties were relatives. It should not be read as a lie, and it was very probably not experienced as one: the Tatar grievance was real, the killings were real, and the men who told the story had watched their own kin die in the feuds it describes. But a study that takes the founding at the text's own valuation will report a war of unification and miss the constitutional revolution being conducted underneath it, in which a khan elected on the old terms spent thirteen years abolishing the terms.

Reading the floor against the framework

Three things this case adds, offered as revisions.

First, the anti-exit prediction holds, and it should be generalised. A floor is ordinarily built by making a subject reachable — a garrison near enough, a register accurate enough, a punishment certain enough. Where the subject cannot be made reachable, as with a pastoral population that dissolves under pressure, the analysis has usually concluded that the floor must simply be weak. This case shows a second construction. **Where exit cannot be blocked, a floor can be built by monopolising the destinations** — by destroying every rival to whom a defector could go, so that leaving stops being a transfer and becomes mere vagrancy. The instrument is not a wall but the elimination of alternatives, and its diagnostic tell is a founding that spends disproportionate effort destroying *rival centres of legitimate acceptance* rather than subduing populations. It is cheap, it is fast, and it requires no administration at all. Its liability is that it is binary: it does not degrade, it fails all at once, on the day a second legitimate centre appears.

Second, the price of discipline was paid at the top, deliberately, and the payment is the evidence. The usual diagnostic in this framework runs that an apex which already holds force and nonetheless pays a real, avoidable cost for something has thereby revealed that the something was genuinely necessary. The founding here runs that test in a harsher direction: an apex that already holds force and spends it destroying the men who put him in place has revealed what he judged the real constraint to be. It was not the enemy. It was the aristocracy's two customary powers — to distribute the plunder and to withdraw its people — and the order was built by taking both, at a cost in senior kinsmen that any prudential calculation would have advised against.

Third, the Menu answer was installed at the founding, and it is a variant the corpus should name. The recognised family of answers to the problem of needing capable men who could replace you includes *preventing* a rival class from forming at all by recruiting the martial and administrative core from men with no local base — the classic case being an imperial service levied from outsiders and forbidden to become hereditary. This founding does that: officers appointed rather than acclaimed, drawn heavily from men of low or servile origin and from pardoned enemies, commanding units they had no prior claim on, with their sons in the khan's guard. But it does it in a harder setting than the classic case, because **the rival class already existed and had to be destroyed before it could be prevented from re-forming.** Prevention where no aristocracy has yet grown is a matter of recruitment policy. Prevention where an aristocracy is already in possession, and is in fact the body that elevated you, is a civil war conducted inside your own kin. The corpus should carry the distinction, because it predicts the founding's characteristic cost — a bitter and permanent hostility among the collateral lines of the ruling house — and that cost is not paid at the founding. It is paid at the successions.

A note on sources. The *Secret History of the Mongols* is a thirteenth-century Middle Mongolian text whose original is long out of copyright but which survives only in Ming-period Chinese transcription; the English renderings quoted here are modern scholarly translations and are given briefly and credited rather than at length. The pre-battle order at Dalan-nemürges and the council decision on the Tatars (§153–154) are quoted from Urgunge Onon's translation as reproduced in the open teaching literature; the 1206 acclamation formula (§202) is quoted from the standard English rendering as reproduced in the reference literature. The confiscation of the booty of Altan, Quchar and Daritai, the resulting defection, and Rashid al-Din's attribution of their break to it, are attested in both the *Secret History* and the *Jami' al-tawarikh* and are given as the scholarship reports them; the election of Temüjin by Altan, Quchar, Sacha Beki and Taichu (§123) and the execution of Sacha Beki and Taichu (§136–137) likewise. Readers should go to Igor de Rachewiltz's edition for the full text and commentary.

The *Secret History* is used throughout for what the imperial tradition held, not as an independent record of events; it was composed for the ruling family within a generation or two of the founding and is a lineage's account of its own rise. Where its chronology conflicts with the other imperial traditions — as on the date of the conferral of the name Chinggis, which it places around 1189 and which Rashid al-Din, the Veritable Record, the *Shengwu qinzheng lu* and the *Yuan shi* place in 1206 — the

reading followed here is the current scholarly one, that the text has conflated two enthronements.

On the "Great Yasa" the discipline is stricter than usual and is stated in the text above. No Mongol law code survives. David Ayalon showed that Maqrizi's much-quoted account was taken, unacknowledged, from Ibn Fadl Allah al-Umari and through him from Juvayni, leaving Juvayni as very nearly the sole source; the thirteenth-century use of *jasaq* denotes a decree rather than a codex. The prohibition on transfer between the thousands is therefore reported here as attested practice — corroborated by its reappearance in the analogous reorganisations under Dayan Khan (1510) and the Qing — and not as a quotable statute. Any account that quotes the Yasa as a code should be treated with suspicion, including accounts sympathetic to this one.

The composition of the guard (one thousand quiver-bearers, one thousand night guards, eight thousand day guards, totalling ten thousand at 1206) and its recruitment from the sons and younger brothers of commanders of tens, hundreds, thousands and ten thousands, each bringing a stated number of companions, follow the *Yuan shi* treatise as summarised in the reference literature; the earlier detachment of seventy day guards and eighty night guards, the guardsman's precedence over a commander of a thousand, and the understanding of guard service as an honourable substitute for hostage-taking are as reported in the standard accounts. The list of ninety-five commanders of a thousand appointed in 1206 is in the *Secret History*.

The origins ascribed to Jebe (an archer of the Tayichi'ud who shot Temüjin's horse at Köyiten and was pardoned and renamed), to Sübe'edei and Jelme of the Uriangqai, to Muqali of the Jalayir, and to Shigi Qutuqu, a Tatar foundling raised by Hö'elün and made supreme judge, are given as the tradition records them; they are the tradition's own account of the founding's meritocratic character and should be read with that interest in view.

Military figures are given as ranges and none is a count. Remounts per man are reported in the campaign literature anywhere from two to eighteen, with most historians settling near five or six. The implied strength of the 1206 army is about ninety-five thousand from the *Secret History*'s own list of commands; Leo de Hartog's lower estimate of seventy to eighty thousand is on record, as is Timothy May's judgement that the ninety-five thousand figure is the only creditable one. The description of the *nerge*, of the liability of males from about fourteen to sixty, of the share-based distribution of booty including the dead man's share to his family, and of the body charged with overseeing that division, follows the standard secondary literature and is paraphrased rather than quoted.

Modern scholarship consulted and paraphrased includes work on the decimal *minghan* as a joint military-administrative unit of households, on Mongol loyalty networks and the position of Temüjin's senior kin, and on the historiography of the Yasa.

MODULE 2

Let No One Alter the Blue Writing

Module 2 · The Settlement — a division made not in land but in households, entered in a register that does not survive, held as property by one bloodline and at pleasure by everyone else, and secretly revised by the man who had forbidden its revision

What there was to divide

Every settlement this collection has examined begins with the same technical problem. Conquered wealth is usually land, and land in the order being conquered is almost never a *thing*. It is a relation between persons — a man's standing with his king, his clan, his village — which happens to be expressed in access to soil and which cannot be handed over, because there is nothing to hand. So the conqueror's first act is a conversion: office into estate, clan right into parcel, collective patrimony into share, occupation into vacancy. Only then can the wealth be granted, and the grant re-sources the recipient's title, so that his claim now comes from a register the conqueror keeps rather than from his own people.

The 1206 settlement did not perform that conversion, because there was nothing to perform it on. Pasture on the steppe was not held as property by anyone, in any form, and it did not become property in 1206 or afterwards. Grazing rights were allotted, moved and reallotted; a *nutuq* was a customary range, not a parcel; and no Mongol at any point in this period could sell, mortgage or bequeath a piece of the grasslands, because the category did not exist and was never manufactured.

What could be divided was people. The wealth of the steppe was livestock and the households that herded it, and the conquest had produced an enormous quantity of both: the Tatars, the Kereit, the Naiman, the Merkit, the Tayichi'ud and the rest, broken as political bodies and available as households. The settlement of 1206 is therefore a division of the population, counted in thousands, and it is worth being blunt about how completely that changes the object under study. A settlement in land is fixed, defensible by a conveyancing rule, and cannot be carried away. A settlement in people is portable, divides cleanly by inheritance, walks off with its holder, and cannot be secured by any rule about title, because the asset has legs.

The decree that opens the division is preserved and it says exactly this. Chinggis announced that he would divide the *subject people* between his mother, his sons and his younger brothers, and the phrase the text uses for what was allotted is the people themselves.

The blue book on white paper

The instrument came first, and it is the strangest thing in the module.

Before the shares were named, the man who would allot them was appointed, and the appointment scene is preserved in the Mongols' own account with an unusual amount of dialogue. When Chinggis called his commanders in to distribute favours, Shigi-qutuqu — a Tatar foundling picked up as a small child and raised by Hö'elün in the khan's own household — asked, before anyone else, what his reward would be. The text gives him a long speech about having served from the cradle. Chinggis answered by calling him a sixth younger brother, giving him the same share as the brothers, and adding an immunity: in recognition of his services he would not be punished for up to nine crimes.

Then came the office. He was to divide the whole nation — the felt-walled households sorted by the names of their tribes, and the inhabitants of the board-doored dwellings, the forest and settled peoples, separated out — with nobody permitted to countermand him. He was made supreme judge with power over life and death. And he was ordered to keep a record:

> *"Write down in a blue book a list of the shares into which [you] divide the nation and of the judgments [you] deliver. Unto the seed of [my] seed, let no one alter the blue writing of Shigi-qutuqu, ordained in consultation with me, [written] on white paper in a blue book and made into a register. Anyone who alters it shall be [found] guilty."*

Consider what has just happened. The property settlement of an empire that would shortly cover a third of Eurasia was placed in the hands of a captured child of the people the settlement's beneficiaries had exterminated three years earlier; it was to be recorded in a single register; and its permanence was secured not by an institution, a court, a class of notaries or a rival power able to hold the khan to it, but by a spoken prohibition against alteration, uttered by the man who had ordered the division.

The register does not survive. No copy, fragment or citation of it survives. Everything known about what it contained comes from a chronicle written for the family that received the largest shares, from Persian and Chinese histories composed a century later by servants of its successors, and from the visible fact that the arrangement it recorded went on operating. The foundational property document of the Mongol Empire is a lost book, known from a decree forbidding its alteration.

This is the module's first finding and it should be stated plainly rather than dressed. The settlements this collection usually examines run on *charters* — instruments that declare who owns what, that can be produced, read out, appealed to, and quoted back

at the power that issued them. A charter's whole utility to the grantee is that it exists independently of the grantor's continued goodwill. What 1206 produced was a *register*: an administrative record of allocations, kept by an official of the khan, in the khan's household, under the khan's authority. A charter is a promise made in public. A register is a filing system. And a filing system does what its keeper does.

Whole peoples kept whole: the exceptions in the list

The general rule of the founding was dissolution — the old peoples broken up and their households redistributed across appointed units so that no thousand was a tribe under a new name. The commander list of 1206 names ninety-five such units. But the list does not end evenly, and the way it ends is the settlement's second tier.

The last entries are sons-in-law. Alchi *güregen* commanding three thousand Onggirat. Butu *güregen* commanding two thousand Ikires. Ala-qush-digit-quri *güregen* of the Önggüt commanding five thousand Önggüt. Ten thousand households out of ninety-five thousand — better than a tenth of the entire nation — left intact, under their own hereditary lords, in their own peoples, bearing their own names.

Every one of those lords was married into the ruling family, and the peoples concerned had one thing in common: they had submitted early or come over at a decisive moment rather than being conquered. The Önggüt chief Ala-qush had warned Chinggis of the Naiman advance in 1203 and shown him the road south. The Onggirat had been the Borjigin marriage partners for generations, and had submitted rather than fight.

So the settlement offered a bargain that is nowhere written down but is legible in the arithmetic of the list: *submit before you are broken, bind yourself by marriage, and you may keep your people*. The price of a people's corporate survival was a permanent affinal relationship with the golden lineage — daughters going in, daughters coming out.

The Onggirat had been running exactly that strategy for generations before it paid, and the Mongols' own text preserves their statement of it, in the mouth of Börte's father when he offers his daughter to Yesügei:

> *"We make our fair-faced daughters sit in the two-wheeled cart, harnessed to a black camel, for you who become qahans, and send them off at a trot. On the qatan throne we make them sit together with you. We have never disputed with other nations over land and people."*

A small people had decided long ago that it would not contest dominion and would instead make itself the indispensable supplier of queens, and in 1206 that policy

returned a dividend no amount of fighting would have bought: it was one of three peoples in the entire empire permitted to remain itself. The Mongol commentary tradition notes that the word for an affine, *quda*, derives from the verb to sell, which is a reasonably frank statement of what the relation was for.

The shares

The division itself is recorded with numbers, and the numbers repay reading closely.

To his mother Hö'elün, together with the share of his youngest brother Temüge Otchigin, ten thousand. To Jochi, the eldest son, nine thousand. To Cha'adai, eight thousand. To Ögödei, five thousand. To Tolui, five thousand. To Qasar, four thousand. To Alchidai, two thousand. To Belgütei, one thousand five hundred. And to Da'aritai, the paternal uncle who had defected to the Kereit, nothing at all — Chinggis ordered him killed, and relented only when Bo'orchu, Muqali and Shigi-qutuqu argued that to do it would be to extinguish his own hearth-fire, at which the text says he wept and let it go.

Two things about these figures need to be held honestly. The first is that the text is internally inconsistent: the passage that lists the allocations gives ten thousand to the mother *including* Otchigin's share, and the passage immediately following says ten thousand each. The family's total is therefore either about forty-four and a half thousand households or about fifty-four and a half thousand, out of ninety-five thousand — either way, between roughly a half and a fifth short of half the entire nation went to eight people related to the khan by blood or marriage. The second is that Rashid al-Din, writing a century later with access to the Ilkhanid archives, gives a different distribution, four thousand to each of the sons and substituting Kölgen for Tolui. Neither set is a count and both should be read as what a later court believed the founding had settled.

The text also records the reception. Of the ten thousand to his mother, it says simply that she resented it and said nothing; the annotator adds that in her own opinion she deserved more. A settlement that leaves the founder's mother silently aggrieved on the day it is made is not being described by a source hostile to the family.

The sixteen minders

The share did not travel alone. Immediately after naming the allocations, Chinggis named the men who would go with them — four for his mother and Otchigin, three for Jochi, three for Cha'adai, two for Ögödei, two for Tolui, one for Qasar, one for Alchidai. Sixteen in all, drawn from his own commanders. One of them, Köke-chos,

was assigned to Cha'adai with an explicit instruction, delivered in front of everyone: Cha'adai was obstinate and narrow-minded, and Köke-chos was to stay beside him morning and evening and advise him.

This is the settlement's counterweight, installed at the moment of grant. A prince received households, and with the households he received men whose careers ran to the centre and whose function was to be present. The arrangement is a familiar one in every order that hands power to princes — the tutor, the resident, the political officer — and its diagnostic value here is what it concedes: the man doing the granting expected the grantees to need watching, and said so in the same breath as the grant.

One of the sixteen matters far beyond his function. Qarachar, appointed to Cha'adai, was of the Barlas, and four generations later a man of that family with no Chinggisid blood would build the last great steppe empire and be unable to call himself khan — ruling instead as *güregen*, son-in-law, through puppet khans of the golden lineage. That is how completely the bloodline rule installed in 1206 held: a hundred and seventy years later the most powerful man in Asia could not claim the title, and had to marry into it and rule in another man's name.

Daughters as governors

Beside the shares to sons and brothers ran a second distribution that the framework's usual categories miss because it looks like family life.

Chinggis married his daughters to the rulers of the peoples he most needed to hold and did not wish to break. Alaqa went to the Önggüt on the Jin frontier. Checheyigen went, around 1207, to a prince of the Oirat by Lake Baikal. Al-Altan went, around 1211, to Barchuq, the *idiqut* of the wealthy Uighurs to the south-west. Qojin married one of his own commanders; Tümelün married an Onggirat nephew of Börte's.

These were not sentimental arrangements and the women were not tokens. The daughters took administrative authority in their husbands' countries, organising people and herds, and in at least one case a daughter whose husband was killed in a revolt escaped to the Mongol army, married her stepson, and re-established control of the region. A marriage of this kind installed a permanent Chinggisid presence at the top of a subject people without dissolving it and without stationing a garrison, and it created the *güregen* class — sons-in-law who were not of the blood, could never rule in their own right, and were bound to the centre by an obligation that renewed every generation because the marriages were repeated every generation.

The Uighur case shows both what the instrument bought and what it did not. Barchuq's people kept their ruler, their religion, their script and their revenue, and supplied the empire with the clerks who ran it. When the Uighur *idiqut* Salindi later

backed the losing side in a Chinggisid civil war, he was tortured and executed by his own brother — and the Uighur royal house was kept in place and married to Chinggisid princesses again. The lineage was disposable; the alliance was not.

What the grantees owed

The single most diagnostic question about any settlement is what the grantee owed in return, because the answer decides how the order will eventually break.

The consideration here was armed service, and the settlement left its beneficiaries in possession of armies. A prince's *qubi* was not a rent-roll; it was a body of households that supplied fighting men, and the prince commanded them. When the empire moved west in 1219, Jochi, Cha'adai and Ögödei were sent across the Oxus to besiege Gurganj at the head of the army of the right hand — their own contingents, drawn from their own shares, under their own command.

This is the older and more dangerous form of co-optation, and this collection has seen the other one often enough to feel the difference. The modern colonial settlement grants land, office and salary in exchange for tax collection and political compliance, and strips the capacity for organised violence with the same government's other hand — paying a warlord to stop being a warlord, converting a capacity into a possession, because a possession can be taken by a court and a retinue only by a war. The medieval European settlement granted land in exchange for a stated number of armed and mounted men, which solved the coordination problem and installed a permanent civil-war risk in the identical clause, because the king's army was the sum of his nobles' retinues and could at any moment become the army that removed him.

The 1206 settlement is squarely the second kind, and more so, because the grantees were not nobles who might be replaced but sons who could not be. The prediction the framework makes about such a settlement is exact: expect the grantees' contingents to become the instrument of the succession dispute, and date the first revolt.

The revocation

And now the contradiction at the centre of the module.

Some years after the division, Chinggis quarrelled with his brother Qasar. The shaman Teb-tenggeri told him that Heaven had given two contradictory omens, one naming Temüjin to hold the nation and one naming Qasar, and that if he did not strike first there was no telling what would follow. Chinggis rode out that night, seized his brother, tied his sleeves, took off his hat and sash and was interrogating him when their mother arrived at dawn, having driven through the night, and shamed him out of it in a

scene the Mongols' own historians chose to preserve in humiliating detail — she sat down, bared her breasts, and asked him whether he recognised them.

He apologised. And then, the text says, without letting his mother know, he secretly took away Qasar's people and left him fourteen hundred. When she found out, the thought of it killed her.

Set that beside the decree of a few pages earlier — unto the seed of my seed, let no one alter the blue writing; anyone who alters it shall be found guilty. The share was reduced by roughly two thirds, in secret, against a full brother, by the man who had forbidden alteration, with no proceeding, no charge and no appeal, on the word of a shaman.

That is the settlement's true constitution while the founder lived. The blue book recorded what had been granted. It did not bind the granter. A *qubi* looked like property, was described in the language of property, was inherited like property — and was in practice held at pleasure, revocable without notice by the only man in the empire who could not be held to account, exactly because there was no power in existence that could keep the account against him.

The other side of the same coin is the privilege the settlement conferred on men outside the bloodline: *darkhan* status, granted in 1206 to those who had helped the rise. A darkhan was exempt from tax, from requisition and from labour service, could enter the khan's tent unannounced, and could not be punished for a specified number of offences — the number usually given as nine, and the immunity heritable. Shigi-qutuqu's nine crimes are the same grant. Read it as a purchase and its meaning is plain: what the founding could offer a man of no blood was not a share of rule but a personal exemption from the state's reach, valid so long as the man who granted it remembered why.

Inside and outside

The boundary of the settlement is the sharpest in the corpus and it can be stated in one word.

Rule belonged to the *altan urugh*, the golden lineage: the descendants of Chinggis Khan. Not the Borjigin generally, not the Mongols generally, and emphatically not the aristocracy that had made him khan — Altan, Quchar and Sacha Beki were of the old ruling kin and their lines got nothing. The line that received was the line that descended from one man, and after him from the four sons of one wife.

Everything else the order could give was grantable and therefore revocable. A command of a thousand was an appointment. A *darkhan* immunity was a favour. A *güregen*'s standing came from a marriage that had to be renewed. A judgeship was an

office. Only the claim to rule was fixed by birth, and nobody outside the line could acquire it by any service whatever.

The framework's usual observation is that a settlement binds an elite by re-sourcing its title — the same man, the same fields, the same neighbours, but his claim now comes from the conqueror's register rather than from his own people, so he defends the arrangement because the arrangement is what makes his holding his. Here the mechanism runs at a steeper angle, because there was no prior title to re-source. The commanders of the thousands had not owned their thousands before. Their entire standing was created by the grant, and every one of them knew that the grant could be unmade the way Qasar's had been.

The hardening

The most consequential thing about the 1206 settlement is not what it established but what it became, and the change happened after the founder was dead.

While Chinggis lived, a share was revocable, and he revoked one. After he died, no share was ever entirely confiscated again. The evidence for this is as stark as historical evidence gets: Temüge Otchigin, the youngest brother, the recipient of the largest single allocation of 1206, attempted to seize the throne during the interregnum after Ögödei's death and was tried and executed for it — and his descendants kept his share. They were still ruling the Ongni'ud, on that share, into the twentieth century. A further descendant, Nayan, rebelled against Qubilai in the 1280s, and the line kept the share through that too.

An appanage that survives its holder's execution for attempted usurpation is not a grant held at pleasure. It is property, and the strongest kind — indefeasible, heritable, and immune to the ordinary sanction for treason.

This is a general mechanism and it is worth naming, because it explains something that happens in almost every founding order and is usually attributed to the weakness of particular heirs. **A grant made at pleasure by a founder becomes property under his successors, because the successor cannot revoke what he did not grant without denying the authority he inherits from.** Chinggis could take back Qasar's people because he was the source of the title and everyone knew it. Ögödei could not take back Otchigin's, because Ögödei's own right rested on his father's disposition, and a man who unpicks his father's dispositions is arguing that they were never binding — which is the one argument he cannot afford to make, since his own throne is one of them.

So the settlement hardened, necessarily, in one direction only, and it hardened at every succession. Each transition converted a little more of the founder's discretionary distribution into inherited right. The empire's constitutional history from 1227

onward is therefore not a story of the shares gradually escaping a strong centre; it is the arithmetic of the founding working itself out, because a settlement made in people, held by a bloodline, transmitted by inheritance, and defended by armed contingents its holders commanded personally, could not have gone any other way.

Reading the settlement against the framework

Four revisions, offered to be argued with.

First, this collection's account of the settlement's technology needs a second case. The standard operation is the conversion of relations into things so that land can be granted — office into estate, clan right into parcel, occupation into vacancy — with the grant then re-sourcing the grantee's title. That operation is not available where the object of value is not land. Here the conqueror divided *households*, and the framework should carry the consequences as a distinct type: **a settlement in people is portable, divides cleanly by inheritance, walks away with its holder, and cannot be secured by any rule about conveyancing, because the asset moves.** Where a land settlement's characteristic crisis is dispossession and its characteristic instrument is the register of title, a people settlement's characteristic crisis is partition and it has no instrument at all.

Second, distinguish the charter from the register. Both are the floor's primary fiction, and they are not equivalent. A charter declares who owns what, exists independently of the grantor, and can be produced and quoted back at power — which is why colonial charters are so often more scrupulous and more genuinely binding than a seizure needed to be, and why the elaboration is the measure of the constraint. A register merely records what was allotted, is kept by the grantor's own official in the grantor's own household, and binds nobody. **Where you find a settlement recorded in a register rather than a charter, expect it to be revocable in practice however permanent it is in language** — and check whether it was in fact revoked, because the revocation will be quiet and it will be the surest evidence of what the instrument was worth. Here the decree forbidding alteration and the secret alteration are twenty pages apart in the same book.

Third, the consideration was armed service, and the framework's prediction should be recorded before the event. A co-optation that leaves its grantees with the capacity for organised violence installs the civil-war risk in the same clause that solves the coordination problem. That is the medieval European failure mode, and this settlement is a harder version of it, because the armed grantees were sons rather than replaceable vassals and their claim was by blood rather than by tenure. The framework

says: date the first revolt. The dates are already visible on the horizon of this study, and they are not 1227.

Fourth — and this is the case's largest contribution — settlements harden across successions in one direction, and the direction is fixed by the successor's own dependence on the founder's authority. A founder's grant is revocable because he is the source of title. His heir's is not, because the heir's own right is one of the founder's dispositions and cannot be treated as revisable without dissolving itself. So every succession converts discretion into property, the centre's share of the whole falls, and the holders' security rises — and this happens whatever the personal capacity of the heir, which is why it is so often misread as weakness. The corpus should test this elsewhere. If it holds generally, then a founding settlement's terms matter far less than its *form*, because the form is what the heirs will be unable to change.

A note on sources. All quotations from the *Secret History of the Mongols* are from Urgunge Onon's translation (*The Secret History of the Mongols: The Life and Times of Chinggis Khan*), and are given briefly and credited; the thirteenth-century Middle Mongolian original is long out of copyright but survives only in Ming-period Chinese transcription, and the English renderings are modern scholarly work. The passages used are the appointment of Shigi-qutuqu, his immunity for nine crimes, his commission to divide the felt-walled and board-doored peoples, and the blue-book decree (§203); the allocation of the subject people to Hö'elün, Otchigin, Jochi, Cha'adai, Ögödei, Tolui, Qasar, Alchidai and Belgütei, and the sparing of Da'aritai (§242); the appointment of the sixteen advisers, including Köke-chos to Cha'adai (§243); the Teb-tenggeri accusation, Hö'elün's intervention, and the secret reduction of Qasar's people to fourteen hundred (§244); the closing entries of the commander list naming Alchi *güregen* with three thousand Onggirat, Butu *güregen* with two thousand Ikires and Ala-qush of the Önggüt with five thousand, and the total of ninety-five thousand households (§202); and Dei Sechen's speech on the Onggirat marriage strategy (§64), together with the Mongolian commentary tradition's derivation of *quda* from the verb meaning to sell. Readers should go to Onon, and to Igor de Rachewiltz's edition and commentary, for the full text.

The *Secret History* is used here for what the imperial tradition held, not as an independent record. It was composed for the ruling family within a generation or two of the founding, and its account of the division is the account the beneficiaries transmitted. The internal inconsistency over whether Hö'elün and Otchigin received ten thousand jointly or ten thousand each is in the text itself and is reported rather than resolved; the family's total is given accordingly as a range of roughly forty-four and a half to fifty-four and a half thousand households out of ninety-five thousand. Rashid

al-Din's divergent figures — four thousand to each son, with Kölgen in place of Tolui — are noted as a competing later tradition. None of these numbers is a count.

On the *qubi* as a share of pastures, households and revenues, on its character as heritable property, and on the survival of Temüge Otchigin's appanage after his execution and its descent to the Ongni'ud into the twentieth century, this module follows the recent scholarship on the Mongol appanage system, paraphrased and credited; the reading of what that survival implies about the hardening of the settlement is this study's own.

On the *güregen* class, the daughters' marriages to the Önggüt, Oirat and Uighur ruling houses, and the later execution of the Uighur *idiqut* Salindi with the simultaneous retention of his dynasty, the module follows the recent work on Chinggisid marriage politics and sons-in-law, paraphrased. Dates for individual marriages are approximate as the scholarship gives them.

On *darkhan* status — exemption from taxation, requisition and labour service, right of unannounced entry, and a heritable immunity from a specified number of offences, usually nine — the account follows the standard reference literature, which records the grants as made in 1206 to those who had assisted the rise.

Qarachar's assignment to Cha'adai is in the *Secret History*; the later Timurid claim to rule as *güregen* through Chinggisid puppet khans is standard and is given here only to show the durability of the bloodline rule, not as a claim about the Barlas genealogy, which is contested.

MODULE 3

From the Rising of the Sun to Its Setting

Module 3 · The Robe — a claim to universal rule addressed not to the conquered, whose belief the order never sought, but to rival sovereigns abroad and to the conquerors' own soldiers at home; and the doctrine the conquered's own clergy then supplied for free

A roll of paper sixteen centimetres high

In the Vatican archives there is a document of ink on paper, sixteen and a half centimetres high and ninety-seven centimetres long. It is in Persian, in Arabic script, with three lines of Turkic at the head and a red seal impressed on it in Mongolian script. It was written near Karakorum in the first half of November 1246 and carried across Asia to Lyon by a Franciscan, John of Plano Carpini, who had watched the man who sent it being raised to the throne a few weeks earlier. It lay unread and unidentified until 1920, when it was found in the archive and published three years later by Paul Pelliot with a French translation.

It is a reply from Güyük, third great khan of the Mongols, to a letter from Pope Innocent IV asking him to stop killing Christians and to consider baptism. It is the fullest statement in the Mongols' own voice, addressed to a named foreign sovereign, of what they claimed their rule was and where it came from — and because both parties in the exchange claimed a universal authority derived from the same sky, it is unusually legible.

The heading, in Turkic, transliterated by the philologists as:

> *M(ä)ngü t(ä)ngri küč(ü)nde / kür (u)l(u)γ ulus n(u)ng Taluï nung / xan y(a)rl(ï)γ(ï)m(ï)z.*
> *"By the power of the Eternal Heaven — of the whole great people, the Oceanic Khan — our command."*

The seal, which the modern Mongolian reading renders directly:

> *"By the power of Eternal Heaven, the command of the Oceanic Khan of the Great Mongol Nation. When it reaches subject peoples and rulers, let them respect it and let them fear."*

Note before anything else what the seal specifies about its own reader. It anticipates arriving in the hands of *rulers*. It is a legend cut for foreign sovereigns and for their

subjects at one remove, and it names the two responses it wants: respect and fear. It does not ask for belief.

What the letter claims

The body is short and its argument runs in a straight line. The Pope had asked why the Mongols had seized the lands of the Hungarians and the Christians and what those peoples' fault was. Güyük's answer is that Heaven itself destroyed them, and that the fault was disobedience:

> *"The eternal God has slain and annihilated these lands and peoples, because they have neither adhered to Chinggis Khan, nor to the Khagan, both of whom have been sent to make known God's command, nor to the command of God. Like thy words, they also were impudent, they were proud and they slew our messenger-emissaries. How could anybody seize or kill by his own power contrary to the command of God?"*

Then the Pope had suggested that Güyük might be baptised. The reply is not a refusal of Christianity but a challenge to the Pope's standing to speak for Heaven at all:

> *"How dost thou know that such words as thou speakest are with God's sanction? From the rising of the sun to its setting, all the lands have been made subject to me. Who could do this contrary to the command of God?"*

And the demand:

> *"You must say with a sincere heart: 'We will be your subjects; we will give you our strength.' You must in person come with your kings, all together, without exception, to render us service and pay us homage. Only then will we acknowledge your submission. And if you do not follow the order of God, and go against our orders, we will know you as our enemy."*

Set out plainly, the doctrine has three moves and they lock together.

The first is that Heaven has issued a command, and that Chinggis and his heirs were sent to make it known. The second is that resistance to that command is not a political act but a sin, punished by Heaven and not by the Mongols — the annihilation of Hungary is described in the passive voice, done by God, with the Mongol army barely present in the sentence. The third, and the one that carries all the weight, is the *evidence*: the extent of the conquest is offered as proof of the mandate. Who could have done this against God's command?

That is a robe of an unusual construction. It does not appeal to a scripture, an ancestor, a coronation rite or a law. It appeals to the map. And in doing so it makes itself, formally, a testable proposition: it says the mandate can be read off the conquests, which means it can also be read off a defeat.

Whom the robe was for

Apply the framework's audience audit — for each population under the floor, ask what was spent on persuading it that the rule was rightful — and the Mongol case comes out very lopsided.

Rival sovereigns. The letter to Innocent is one of a set. Similar demands went to Louis IX, to the Seljuk sultan, to the Armenian and Georgian courts, to Song China. The instrument is standardised: preamble invoking Eternal Heaven, statement that Heaven has given the earth to the khan, demand for personal submission, threat. That is a robe, and a substantial and expensive one — chanceries, translators, embassies, envoys crossing continents for years — cut for men whose recognition affected whether the empire had to fight them.

The army and the coordinating class. The second audience is the one this framework says is most often mistaken for the first. The soldiers and commanders who filled the units, and the golden lineage that held the shares, needed to believe that the man giving orders held Heaven's warrant. The instruments here are the ones the founding produced: the acclamation at the source of the Onon, the white standard of nine tails, the shaman Teb-tenggeri declaring the name by Heaven's decree, the descent from a marked ancestor born clutching a clot of blood. And the letter's doctrine serves this audience as much as the foreign one, because it tells the man who has just burned a town that the burning was Heaven's punishment on the impudent and not his own crime.

The conquered. And here, measured against the other two, there is almost nothing.

The framework's sharpest diagnostic is that force never pays for what it does not need. An apex holding uncontested force that nonetheless spends real, avoidable resources on legitimacy has revealed that some audience's belief mattered. The reverse also holds: where an apex secures force and then spends nothing on persuading a population, the silence is a finding.

The Mongols made no attempt to convert anyone to anything. They imposed no creed, built no schools for the conquered, required no oath of belief, ran no missionary effort, and did not ask a Persian, a Chinese or a Rus' villager to think Mongol rule rightful. What they required was submission, tribute, and the delivery of men and

goods on demand. On the framework's own test that is a clear reading: toward the conquered majority the floor was doing the whole job, and the order knew it.

What looks like a robe toward the conquered, and what it actually is

There is one apparent exception, and it is the most quoted sentence in the entire Mongol record.

In February 1220, after the fall of Bukhara, Chinggis is said to have climbed into the pulpit of the Friday mosque and addressed the assembled scholars and notables through an interpreter:

> *"O people, know that you have committed great sins, and that the great ones among you have committed these sins. If you ask me what proof I have for these words, I say it is because I am the punishment of God. If you had not committed great sins, God would not have sent a punishment like me upon you."*

That reads like a robe cut for a conquered population in its own religious idiom — the conqueror as the scourge of God, a figure entirely at home in Islamic and Christian eschatology, which explains catastrophe as divine correction rather than as human defeat.

Now look at who is telling us.

The report comes from Ata-Malik Juvayni, in the *Tarikh-i Jahan Gusha*, the History of the World Conqueror, begun during a visit to Mongolia in 1252–53 and finished around 1260. Juvayni was a Persian of a scribal family that had served Muslim rulers for generations; he was in Mongol employment, and he was subsequently placed in the service of Hülegü, the man who sacked Baghdad and killed the Caliph. His own thesis — the thesis of his book — was that the Mongol conquests were God's punishment of the Muslims for their sins, and that the wise course was to learn the lesson and accept Mongol authority.

The speech may well be authentic; Chinggis had Muslim advisers who could have supplied the idiom, and the argument was in his interest. But whether or not he said it, its survival and its circulation are the work of a conquered administrator writing in the conquered's own language, for the conquered's own reading public, explaining their submission to them in terms their own faith already supplied. Nobody in the Mongol chancery had to draft it, pay for it, or translate it.

This is worth naming as a mechanism, because the framework has not had a clean case of it. The trusted-information position can be acquired in three ways — forged

new, redirected by getting behind a channel the people already trust, or inherited by destroying the previous occupant and refilling the vacancy. There is a fourth possibility that costs the conqueror nothing at all, and this is it. **Where a conqueror declines to build a robe toward the conquered, the conquered's own interpreter class will frequently build one anyway** — because that class must explain its own defeat to its own people, and must explain its own survival and continued employment to itself, and the only vocabulary available for both jobs is the one it already holds. The conqueror does not commission it. He merely fails to prevent it, and it is more persuasive than anything he could have written, because it comes from the pulpit the audience already trusts.

The diagnostic is straightforward: a legitimating doctrine composed in the conquered's own religious idiom, by a member of the conquered elite, employed by the conquerors, and circulating chiefly among the conquered. Ask who it was written for and the answer will not be the conqueror.

The exemptions, and what they were actually buying

The one thing the Mongols *did* spend on toward the conquered was clergy, and the shape of the spending is the module's clearest evidence about what the order thought it needed.

The pattern begins early and personally. In 1219, on his viceroy Muqali's recommendation, Chinggis granted tax-exempt status to the Buddhist monk Haiyun and his master — the earliest such grant on record. Then came the Daoist. Chinggis had summoned Qiu Chuji, the Quanzhen master known as Changchun, out of north China, having been told he was three hundred years old and possessed the secret of long life; Qiu made the journey across Asia and met him in the Hindu Kush in 1222, told him frankly that he had no elixir, and advised him to hunt less and moderate his appetites. Chinggis did not take the advice. He gave the man authority over the Daoists of China and exemption from taxation and labour service, formalised by decree in March 1223.

The critical detail is that the edict was directed at Qiu Chuji and his disciples personally, not at Daoism as an institution — and the Mongols did not at this stage distinguish clearly between Daoism and Buddhism at all. Only later did exemption widen from named clerics to whole clerical castes, and the terms were consistent throughout: immunity from tax, from requisition and from labour service, **in exchange for prayers for the khan and his family** and for the ability to intercede with Heaven on the dynasty's behalf.

Read that as the purchase it was. This is not a principle of religious liberty, and reading it as one — an error with a long pedigree, running from Gibbon to the modern popular literature — misses what it was for and therefore what it tells us. It was a procurement contract. The khan was buying intercession, from whoever could plausibly supply it, at a price he set. That the suppliers were Buddhist, Daoist, Nestorian, Muslim and later Orthodox was a fact about the market, not a statement about creed.

Two consequences follow that the tolerance reading cannot produce. The first is that the vaguely drafted edicts were immediately abused: Qiu Chuji's Daoist followers used them to seize Buddhist temples and force Buddhist monks to convert, opening a Buddhist–Daoist conflict that ran for the rest of the century. A tolerance policy does not do that. A badly drafted franchise does. The second is that the exemptions were withdrawn when the fiscal position required it — Qubilai compelled the clergy of east Asia to pay commercial and land taxes when he needed money for the throne, and a fourteenth-century khan of the Golden Horde briefly taxed the Orthodox Church.

The framework's revealed-preference test applies here in its sharpest form and yields a finding worth carrying. The Mongols held uncontested force over the clergy of half of Eurasia and did not need to buy anything from them. They paid anyway, in forgone revenue and forgone labour — a real, avoidable, recurring cost. The expenditure proves that something was genuinely needed. But look at what: not the *belief* of the conquered populations, which the Mongols never sought and never tested, but the *channel*. What an exemption bought was a working transmission line into a population the conquerors had no intention of forming — a class of men already trusted, already speaking, already believed, now with a standing financial interest in the dynasty's longevity and a professional duty to pray for it aloud, weekly, in public.

This is the conqueror who buys the interpreter without buying the belief, and it is remarkably cheap, because the interpreter's credibility was built by somebody else over centuries and is simply rented.

The sorting variable

The seed for this study guessed that the Mongol order was neither tolerant nor oppressive but *sorted*, with a legible sorting variable, and that the variable was submission versus resistance rather than creed. The evidence supports that, with a refinement: there were two sorting operations running, and neither used creed.

For **populations**, the variable was submission versus resistance. Surrender before the siege engines were assembled and pay, and the city stood; resist, and it did not. The record shows this applied to Muslim, Christian, Buddhist and shamanist alike, and it

applied to Mongols too — the Tatars had been measured against a linchpin for resisting, and the Jürkin executed for defecting. Creed enters nowhere in the calculation.

For **clergy**, the variable was usefulness of intercession. Anyone who could credibly pray to Heaven for the khan was worth an exemption. Groups that could not be fitted to that description — Confucian literati, initially, and in some readings Jews — were slower to receive one, which is the tell: the criterion was not the sanctity of religion in general but the specific service being bought.

Both variables are legible, both are indifferent to doctrine, and both are exactly what a ruler would choose who needed compliance and intercession and did not need conviction.

Möngke's hand, and what it was not saying

The most attractive statement of the Mongol position, and the one most often lifted out of context, comes from the report of William of Rubruck, the Franciscan sent to Karakorum by Louis IX, who was received by Möngke in May 1254 and dismissed the following year. Möngke had staged a formal debate between Christians, Muslims and Buddhists, with appointed arbiters and rules against insult, and afterwards told the friar, in Rockhill's translation:

> *"We Mongol believe that there is only one God, by whom we live and by whom we die, and for whom we have an upright heart... But as God gives us the different fingers of the hand, so he gives to men several paths."*

He added that God had given the Christians the Scriptures and the Christians did not keep them, and that the Mongols had been given diviners, did what the diviners told them, and lived in peace.

Read carefully, that is not a doctrine of religious equality and it is not addressed to a conquered population. It is addressed to an envoy of a foreign king, by a ruler who has just held a doctrinal debate as a court entertainment with himself as its judge, and it makes three claims in succession: that the Mongols hold the correct monotheism; that all the paths are given out by the same hand; and — the operative one — that the Christians are worse at keeping their own law than the Mongols are at keeping theirs. It is a claim of superiority delivered in the idiom of accommodation, and Möngke sent Rubruck home with a letter for Louis warning that if the Christians heard the decree of the eternal God and did not believe it, and came against him in arms, the Mongols knew what they could do.

The plurality is real, it was legislated, and it was enforced. It is also not what it is usually taken for. Different fingers on one hand is a statement about whose hand it is.

Provenance, and the doctrine's fuse

On provenance, the Mongol robe was largely *inherited* from the wreckage of earlier steppe orders and then expanded. Heaven above and earth below, a qaghan raised by Heaven's favour, and a mandate held on condition of conduct had all been carved in stone on the Orkhon five centuries earlier by Türk qaghans, and were part of the standing repertoire of the grasslands. What the Mongols added was the extension of the mandate from *the steppe* to *the earth* — the Türk claim had been to the peoples of the felt tents and the sacred forest of Ötükän, and Güyük's is to everything from sunrise to sunset. That expansion needed no new theology. It needed only conquests.

Toward the conquered, the robe was a thin *redirect* — clergy of other faiths hired to pray — and, as the Bukhara case shows, partly a fourth thing altogether: a doctrine supplied by the conquered's own interpreters, unbidden.

On tested versus revealed, this doctrine is anomalous in the corpus and the anomaly is the module's most useful finding.

The usual failing creed is one held as *revealed*: its predictions fail, and the failure is read as insufficient faith rather than as evidence against the doctrine, so that nothing can ever refute it. The Mongol claim is the opposite. It is formally *tested* — it stakes itself on an observable fact and invites the reader to check. *From the rising of the sun to its setting, all the lands have been made subject to me. Who could do this contrary to the command of God?* A doctrine that rests its authority on the extent of the map has agreed in advance to be judged by the map.

For fifty years the map cooperated, and this is why the doctrine looks so much stronger than it was. Between 1206 and the late 1250s the Mongols were not decisively beaten in the field by anyone, and the claim was therefore never presented with the case it could not answer. But the fuse was in the sentence from the beginning, and it is worth stating precisely what would light it: not a lost battle, of which there were several, but a *defeat that stood* — a frontier that stopped and did not resume. That is the horizon this study runs to, and the doctrine's authors had built the test into their own creed.

On sincerity, the framework's rule is to bracket what cannot be recovered and read the deviations. The Mongol elite's conduct does not read as cynical use of a doctrine they privately discounted. They consulted diviners before campaigns and obeyed them; they observed a body of taboo about water, fire and the person of the khan seriously enough that foreign envoys had to be coached in it; Möngke told a friar he expected to

be judged and meant it; and the ruling family paid, for generations, in real revenue, to keep prayers going up on its behalf from clergy of four religions. Men buying that much intercession, that consistently, over that long, were not performing.

Reading the robe against the framework

Four revisions.

First, the reversed robe has three audiences here, not two, and the third is a rival sovereign. The colonial pattern this collection has documented reverses the robe away from the conquered and onto the metropole that funds the war and the soldiers who fight it. This case has no metropole — the conquerors and the home front are the same people — so the weight redistributes onto the army and the golden lineage, and onto a third audience the colonial cases mostly lack: **foreign sovereigns whose recognition determines whether they must be fought.** The chancery, the standardised demand letter, the envoys crossing continents for years, are all robe expenditure, and it is aimed outward at equals rather than downward at subjects. Where an order's frontier is open and its neighbours are numerous, expect a large share of its legitimating budget to go into diplomacy, and read the demand letter as a robe document rather than as a threat with decoration.

Second — and this is the case's principal contribution — a robe can be supplied by the conquered themselves, unbidden, and it is the cheapest provenance of all. To *forge*, *redirect* and *inherit*, add **outsource**. Where a conqueror declines to legitimate himself to a conquered population, that population's own interpreter class often does the work for him, because it must explain the defeat to its congregation and its own continued employment to itself, and the only idiom available is its own. The result is more persuasive than anything the conqueror could have commissioned, precisely because it is not his. The diagnostic is a legitimating doctrine in the conquered's religious vocabulary, written by a member of the conquered elite in the conqueror's service, circulating chiefly among the conquered — and the test is to ask who paid for it, and find that nobody did.

Third, distinguish buying the belief from buying the channel. The revealed-preference test says that an apex holding uncontested force which nonetheless pays for legitimacy has revealed that some audience's belief was needed. This case shows the test needs a second question, because the Mongols paid a large, recurring, avoidable price — clerical exemption from tax, requisition and labour across half of Eurasia — while making no attempt whatever to instil belief in anyone. What the payment bought was not conviction but **a working transmission line into populations the conqueror had no intention of forming**: a class already trusted, already speaking weekly, now

with a financial stake in the dynasty and a professional duty to pray for it in public. So when the expenditure is found, ask not only *whose belief mattered* but *whose voice was being rented*, because the second is much cheaper and leaves a very similar trace.

Fourth, a doctrine that makes conquest the proof of mandate is tested in form, and its fuse is a frontier that stops. Most load-bearing creeds are insulated from their own results. This one is not: it stakes the ruler's authority on an observable and reversible fact. That construction is unusually strong while the fact holds, because it requires no formation, no clergy of its own, no schools and no argument — the map does the persuading. It is correspondingly brittle, and its failure mode is specific and predictable. **Where an order's legitimacy rests on demonstrated expansion, the collapse of the legitimacy will be dated not to a lost battle but to a frontier that stops and does not resume** — and, since the same order's soldiers are also paid out of expansion, the doctrine and the balance sheet will run out at the same moment.

A note on sources. Güyük's letter of November 1246 survives as a Persian roll in the Vatican archives (Archivio Segreto Vaticano, A.A., Arm. I–XVIII, 1802 (2)), ink on paper, approximately 16.5 by 97 centimetres, with a Turkic preamble and a Mongolian-script seal; it was found in the archive in 1920 and published with a French translation by Paul Pelliot in 1923, and Latin versions of the same letter survive independently, one in Salimbene de Adam's autograph. The Turkic preamble is given in the transliteration of Igor de Rachewiltz and Volker Rybatzki, *Introduction to Altaic Philology* (Brill, 2010), p. 169. The English of the body and the seal follows the standard rendering from Pelliot's Persian text as reproduced in the reference literature; the passage beginning "You must say with a sincere heart" is corroborated in Igor de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys to the Great Khans* (Stanford, 1971), p. 103. The date at the foot of the letter corresponds to the first third of November 1246. Readers wanting the letter whole should go to Pelliot and to de Rachewiltz rather than to this account.

The Bukhara speech is quoted from Ata-Malik Juvayni, *Tarikh-i Jahan Gusha*, in J. A. Boyle's translation, *The History of the World-Conqueror* (1958), p. 105, and is given briefly and credited. Bukhara fell in February 1220; some accounts place the speech in 1221 and the discrepancy is noted rather than resolved. Juvayni's position — a Persian scribe in Mongol service, later in Hülegü's, whose book advances the thesis that the conquests were divine punishment for Muslim sin — is a matter of record and is what this module's reading of the passage rests on. The reading itself, that the speech functions as a doctrine supplied by the conquered's own interpreter class rather than commissioned by the conqueror, is this study's own and is offered to be argued with; it does not depend on the speech being inauthentic, and no claim is made here either way.

Möngke's remarks to William of Rubruck are quoted from W. W. Rockhill's translation, *The Journey of William of Rubruck to the Eastern Parts of the World, 1253–55* (Hakluyt Society, 1900), which is in the public domain; the audience took place in 1254 and the debate Möngke convened is described in the same text. Möngke's letter to Louis IX, carried back by Rubruck, is summarised rather than quoted.

On the clerical exemptions: the 1219 grant to the monk Haiyun on Muqali's recommendation, the summoning of Qiu Chuji (Changchun) and their meeting in 1222, the decree of March 1223, the personal rather than institutional scope of the early edicts, the exchange of exemption for prayers on behalf of the khan and his family, the Daoist seizure of Buddhist temples that followed, and the later withdrawal of exemptions under Qubilai and under Janibeg of the Golden Horde, all follow the recent scholarship on Mongol religious policy and tax exemption, paraphrased and credited. Changchun's own travel account, kept by his disciple, survives and is a primary source for the journey.

On the acclamation of 1206, the white standard of nine tails, and the conferral of the name by the shaman Teb-tenggeri, see the treatment in this study of the founding; the *Secret History* and Rashid al-Din differ on the date, and the naming is followed here in Rashid al-Din's version. The Türk claims on the Orkhon inscriptions of the 730s, invoked above as the inherited repertoire, are quoted in this study's opening landscape from E. Denison Ross's English rendering of Vilhelm Thomsen (1930), now in the public domain.

Modern scholarship consulted and paraphrased includes the literature on Mongol political theology and religious exemption, on the papal embassies, and on Juvayni's career and purposes. Where a famous line's provenance is doubtful it has been flagged rather than smoothed; no quotation in this module has been reconstructed from memory.

MODULE 4

As Soon as They Are Two or Three Years Old

Module 4 · Formation — how an order acquired the finest soldiery in the world at no cost, because the households were already making it; what its founder had to add and could not; and why, having declined to form anyone it conquered, it lost its own grandchildren to the people it ruled

What is being described

Formation is not persuasion and it is not propaganda. Persuasion works on an adult who is already equipped to weigh it, and mostly fails; the wary grown person is well defended against being argued into a creed he has reason to doubt. Formation happens earlier and lower down. It is the process by which a small child acquires the equipment he will later do his weighing *with*: the cast of the world and what it is for, which people are the natural sources of a true account and which are not, which men are the kind that give orders and which are the kind that take them, which commitments lie outside calculation altogether, and what a good life looks like. It arrives not as a set of proposals but as the standard by which later proposals will be assessed, and it arrives before there is anyone in there capable of refusing it.

Two consequences follow that govern everything in this module.

The first is that the deepest thing formation installs is not a doctrine but a *distribution of trust*. Nobody verifies more than a sliver of what he must believe, so everybody defers, constantly, to sources he cannot check. Which sources — and, more exactly, which *marks* identify a source as one to be trusted — is settled in childhood and thereafter feels not like a policy but like the plain facts. To control a child's formation is therefore to be handed the answer to a question that will be put again every day of his adult life: whom do I believe?

The second is that **there is no unformed person.** Formation is not a service a state elects to supply. It is what happens to every child everywhere, by somebody, and if a conquering power declines to do it the population does not become blank and available. It stays formed by whoever was forming it already. This is the mechanism that makes withheld formation such an expensive omission: the conqueror who refuses to form a people has not left a gap. He has left an incumbent in possession.

The Mongol case runs both halves of that harder than any other in this collection — because it received the most complete formation of its own soldiery in the corpus for nothing, and because it withheld formation from every single population it conquered.

The household was the school

Two Franciscans who crossed Asia in the thirteenth century, and whose reports survive in translations long out of copyright, describe the making of a Mongol child, and their descriptions agree.

John of Plano Carpini, who reached Güyük's enthronement in 1246, wrote:

> *"they are all, big and little, excellent archers, and their children begin as soon as they are two or three years old to ride and manage horses and to gallop on them, and they are given bows to suit their stature and are taught to shoot; they are extremely agile and also intrepid."*

He adds, in the same passage, that girls and women rode and galloped as the men did, that he had seen them carrying bows and arrows, that both sexes could endure very long stretches of riding, and that the women made everything of leather, drove and repaired the carts and loaded the camels. William of Rubruck, seven years later, gives essentially the same account.

Consider what a household of that kind is, structurally. By the age at which a settled child of the same century was still being carried about, a Mongol child was mounted. By four he could ride bareback. The bow arrived scaled to him, so that the years in which the hand and eye are still being built were spent building them around a weapon. He herded, which is to say he spent his childhood in charge of animals in open country with the consequences of inattention immediately visible. He was cold and hungry regularly, and learned that this was ordinary. He took part in the seasonal hunt, which is a coordinated encirclement of game across a large front — a military manoeuvre performed as subsistence. And around all of that ran the transmission of who his people were, whose orders counted, and what a man was for.

This is the single most important economic fact about the Mongol order, and it is a fact about children. Every other conquering power in this collection had to build, staff and pay for the institutions that turned an ordinary child into a usable soldier — the drill, the barracks, the levy, the sergeant, the years of formation and the wages during them. The Mongol state built none of it. The households delivered, at their own expense, as a by-product of how they already lived, a population of which essentially every male between fourteen and sixty was a mounted archer capable of very

long marches on very little. The army that took Eurasia was raised for free, by mothers and fathers who were not aware they were operating a military academy.

And the *nerge*, the great winter hunt, was the annual assembly of that same formation at scale — seven men in ten summoned with their arms, deployed as right wing, left wing and centre, closing a ring across enormous ground over days or weeks, the kill counted and shared. It rehearsed the order once a year in the only medium the order actually ran on: a coordinated wheeling of tens of thousands of men over hundreds of kilometres, with every commander's competence visible to the khan and nobody killed. No sedentary power could have afforded such an exercise. This one got it as a form of dinner.

Why the steppe's formation was honest, and why that was a problem

The reason the trust machinery is capturable at all is that in large societies the *mark* of an authority and the *competence* behind it come apart, so the mark can be manufactured without the competence. In a band of a few dozen or a few hundred known people they cannot come apart, because everyone has watched the authority earn his standing across their whole life. The elder was the man whose judgement had been observed to be right for forty years. The master hunter was the man whose kills everyone had eaten.

The steppe in 1200 was still very close to that condition, and it is worth registering the fact plainly because it inverts the usual analysis. Formation on the grasslands was, in the specific sense that matters here, *honest*. A camp was a few hundred people who knew each other. A boy deferred to his lineage head because he had watched him ride, decide, provide and be obeyed. The cue and the substance were the same object, and no one could forge one without the other. There was nothing for an exploiter to work in.

Which produced the founding's central formative problem, and it is the sharpest one in the case.

The reorganisation of 1206 abolished exactly this. It broke the kin groups, distributed the households across ninety-five numbered units, and put over each unit a commander the khan had *appointed* — a man who might be a blacksmith's son from the Uriangqai, or a Jalayir from a people that had been in servile dependence, or the Tayichi'ud archer who had shot the khan's horse in the neck at Köyiten and then walked in and admitted it. Every one of those men now commanded a thousand households who had never watched him become anything.

So the founding had to do something that had never had to be done on the steppe: detach deference from a lineage head everyone had observed, and reattach it to an office held by a stranger. That is precisely the operation this framework says is dangerous, because it is the operation that makes the mark forgeable. And the founder had no formative apparatus to do it with — no schools, no scripture, no priesthood, no literate class of his own.

The narrated service record, and the book that carried it

What he had instead was witness and story, and the way he used them repays close attention.

Every appointment was made to rest on a service that the audience had seen or could be told about in circumstantial detail, and the tellings were preserved. The *Secret History* is, on its surface, a chronicle. Read for what it does rather than what it says, a very large part of it is a certification file: the boy Bo'orchu riding out to help a stranger recover eight stolen geldings and refusing payment; Jelme's father bringing him as a gift in the cradle; Sorqan-shira hiding a fugitive in a cart of wool and letting him go; Shigi-qutuqu picked up as a Tatar foundling and raised at the threshold. Each of these is the answer to the question a Mongol trooper would otherwise have had to ask: *why him?* And each answer takes the same form — because of what he did, in front of people, at a cost to himself.

That is exactly the cue the mind is built to read for sincerity: a man who pays for his commitment is believed to hold it. The founding could not manufacture inherited standing for its new officers and did not try. It substituted a public, narrated, costly record of service, and then made sure the record was transmitted.

Which is why the text's officer lists — ninety-five names, in order — are not padding. They are the point. And it is why the anecdotes cluster so heavily around the men who ended up commanding thousands. The book is a formative document, and its function is to install, in the next generation, who the natural leaders are and what makes a man one.

Note also who it was for. It was written for the ruling family and not circulated; the later Chinese translators called it a *secret* history for that reason. The most formative text the order produced was addressed to a few hundred people at the top. Ordinary Mongols were formed by their households; the golden lineage was formed by the household *and* the book.

The one thing the founding added: the guard as a nursery

Beyond the narrated record, the founding built exactly one new formative institution, and it is the most economical instrument in the whole case.

The imperial guard was enlarged in 1206 to ten thousand men — one thousand quiver-bearers, one thousand night guards, eight thousand day guards — and its recruitment rule was that it be filled from the sons and younger brothers of the commanders of tens, hundreds, thousands and ten thousands, each arriving with a stated retinue of companions, more the higher his father's command.

Read as a formative institution rather than as a bodyguard, what that does is take a young man out of his father's tent and place him in the khan's, at the age when a man's picture of the world is still being finished. He serves in rotation in the khan's household. He watches the khan decide. He learns the running of the army from inside. He eats there, he is paid there, his standing comes from there, and a guardsman outranked a commander of a thousand in the field. And then he is sent out to command.

Every load-bearing lever runs at once and in the same direction. The authority he is learning to defer to is now the khan and not his father. The group whose belonging he cannot do without is now the guard and not his lineage. His identity is fused to the order by an initiation and a uniform and a shift roster. And it is all installed young, on top of a household formation that had already made him a rider and an archer, so the state adds only the last and cheapest layer to a person who is otherwise complete.

The nobility experienced it as an honour, which is what a hostage system looks like when it is working. But the more important thing it did was not to hold sons as surety. It was to make the empire's next generation of commanders men whose formative years were spent inside the ruling household — so that the deference the steppe had always given to a lineage head was, in them, given to an office.

Two smaller instruments belong beside it. In 1204 a captured Uighur scribe, Tatatonga, keeper of the Naiman seals, was set to teaching the Uighur script to the sons of the Mongol nobility — so that a literate cadre was formed inside the household, from a prisoner, in a borrowed alphabet. And the calendar of the order — the winter *nerge*, the assemblies, the body of taboo about water and fire and the person of the khan that foreign envoys had to be coached in before they were admitted — supplied the yearly rehearsal that any formation needs to stay installed.

What was withheld, from whom, and what happened in the gap

Now the other half, and it is total.

The Mongols made no attempt to form anybody they conquered. There were no Mongol schools for Chinese, Persian or Rus' children. There was no conversion effort, no imposed creed, no language policy, no attempt to produce a Chinese who thought of himself as Mongol. The order asked for submission, tribute, men, grain and labour on demand. It did not ask for belief and did not build the machinery that would have produced it.

It did not even do the thing colonial powers usually do when they withhold formation from a population — form a thin administrative cadre from among the conquered, educated just enough to run the collection and not enough to claim admission. The Mongols skipped that too. They simply *hired administrators who had already been formed by somebody else*: Yelü Chucai, a Khitan aristocrat given a full Jin classical education; Mahmud Yalavach and his son Mas'ud Beg, Khwarazmian Muslims; Uighur scribes; Chinese clerks; Persian accountants. Every one of them arrived with a completed framework installed by an order the Mongols had just destroyed, held portable competence, and had no stake in the empire beyond his post.

The framework's expectation for such a case is clear and it is met exactly. The conquered were not left unformed, because nobody is. The formations already running simply held the field. The Chinese child went on being formed Chinese; the Persian child went on being formed Muslim; the calendar, the clergy, the classics, the shrines and the mothers all continued. From the Mongol point of view this was not a failure but a saving — it cost nothing, it was quiet, and for as long as the floor held it produced compliance without conviction, which was all the order required.

But there is a second-order consequence in this case that the corpus has not seen before, and it runs in the opposite direction to the one everyone expects.

The dilution runs upward

The Mongols were a very small number of people. Perhaps seven hundred thousand on the grasslands at the founding, against something over fifty million in north China alone. When they conquered, they did not settle as a peasantry; they dispersed as a thin ruling class, in ordos and garrisons, among enormous populations they had declined to form.

Which means their own children were raised among those populations. By their women. By nurses, tutors, clerks, physicians and clergy drawn from the conquered. In cities the conquered had built, on a calendar the conquered kept.

The framework says that whoever holds a child before his vigilance matures sets his distribution of trust for life. It does not say the child has to be a subject's.

The evidence is the household of Tolui, and it is as clean an experiment as the record supplies. His widow Sorghaghtani Beki — a Kereit princess, a Christian of the Church of the East, illiterate herself — administered the family's appanage across the steppe and Hebei for twenty years and raised four sons. She funded mosques and madrasas for her Muslim subjects, cultivated Buddhist and Daoist monks in the Chinese lands where her estates lay, and had her sons taught the languages and the creeds of the peoples they would rule. She was, in the most literal sense, running a formation programme, and it was one that took its content from the conquered.

The four sons who came out of it were Möngke, Qubilai, Hülegü and Ariq Böke, and they did not come out the same — because after the household came the posting, and the postings were different.

Qubilai was given north China to govern in his twenties, and surrounded himself there with Confucian advisers; by 1260 he was proclaiming a Chinese reign-title and building a bureaucracy. Hülegü went west and founded a dynasty in Iran whose descendants would be Muslim within two generations. Möngke ran the empire from the steppe. And Ariq Böke stayed in Karakorum — and here the record supplies a detail so exact it might have been designed for this analysis. **A Confucian tutor was arranged for Ariq Böke, at Qubilai's instance, and Ariq Böke did not take to Chinese scholars as his brother had.** Rubruck, who saw him, records him making the sign of the cross and saying that the Messiah is God.

Same mother. Same tent. Same creed in the household. Different countries, different tutors, different men.

1260, read as a formation event

The war that ends this study is usually read as a succession dispute, and structurally it is. But look at what the two sides were made of.

When Möngke died at Diaoyu in 1259, Qubilai was proclaimed at Kaiping in 1260 by an assembly convened near his Chinese power base, with Confucian advisers in his camp — one of them, Lian Xixian, subsequently commanding armies for him — and he took a Chinese reign motto in the same act. Ariq Böke was proclaimed at Karakorum by an assembly of steppe nobles and became the figurehead of a faction that held, in David Morgan's summary of their position, that there was a dangerous drift toward softness among Mongols like Qubilai who thought there was something to be said for settled civilisation; that the centre of the empire ought to remain in Mongolia and the nomadic life be preserved uncontaminated; and that China should merely be exploited.

That is not a quarrel about who should be khan. It is two accounts of what the world is and who a Mongol is, held by two brothers of one mother, and the reason they held different accounts is that different populations had had the raising of them. The empire came apart along a line that the formation had drawn.

And note the arithmetic underneath, because it decided the outcome. Qubilai won partly because the country that had formed him could also feed him: he had the agricultural surplus of north China and Ariq Böke had the arid steppe and an import problem. The formation and the balance sheet pointed the same way, which is usually how these things go.

Reading formation against the framework

Four contributions.

First, confirmation, in its cheapest possible form: the order that builds no formative apparatus of its own is running on somebody else's, and it is nearly free. The Mongol soldier arrived complete at zero cost to the state, because the pastoral household was already a military academy and did not know it. This is the cheapest army in the corpus by a very wide margin, and it explains an otherwise puzzling fact — that an order with no schools, no scripture, no priesthood and no bureaucracy of its own could out-fight everyone. It was not paying for what its enemies were paying for, because the childhoods were doing it. **But borrowed formation cannot be transmitted.** An order that never built the apparatus has nothing to run the moment the households stop producing that kind of child — which is to say, the moment its people leave the grasslands. The free army is only free at home, and every Mongol who moved into a city was a soldier the next generation would not get.

Second, a conqueror who appoints strangers over aristocrats must supply a new cue for legitimate authority, and where the society is still small enough that the old cue was honest, the only one available is a narrated, publicly witnessed record of costly service. The steppe's deference had rested on a mark and a merit that could not be separated, because everyone had watched. Abolishing the lineage command abolished that. What replaced it was a body of circumstantial stories about what each new commander had done and what it had cost him — preserved, transmitted, and read to the ruling family as the tradition's own account of itself. The corpus should carry **the officer list as a formative document**, and the diagnostic is this: where a founding promotes outsiders over hereditary claimants, look for a text that narrates each promotion's justifying service, and read it as certification rather than as chronicle.

Third — and this is the case's principal contribution — where a conquering minority declines to form the conquered and disperses among them as a ruling class, the incumbent formation does not merely hold the field among the ruled. It forms the conqueror's own grandchildren. The collection's existing finding is that withheld formation leaves an incumbent in possession, and that the unformed population eventually becomes a problem for the conqueror. That is right, and it is only half of what withholding does. The other half depends on a ratio and on a domestic arrangement, and it should be tested as such: **count the conquerors against the conquered, and then ask who holds the conqueror's children in their first seven years.** Where the conquerors are few, are dispersed among the many, and have their sons raised by the conquered's women, tutored by the conquered's scholars and attended by the conquered's clergy, expect the ruling house to be absorbed within about three generations — and expect the absorption to sort by **which population each branch was posted among**, not by which ancestor each branch descends from. The Mongol succession states are the clean instance and their divergence is visible in one household before it is visible in an empire.

Fourth, a caution about the direction of the first finding. It would be easy to read the third point as saying that formation withheld is simply self-defeating, and the case does not support that. Withholding was *correct* for the problem the Mongols actually had, which was extraction at scale from populations they could not have formed even if they had wanted to and had no instrument for forming. It cost them nothing for two generations and delivered exactly the compliance they needed. What it cost them arrived late, was paid in a different currency, and was invisible from where they stood when they made the choice: not a rebellion of the unformed conquered, but the quiet conversion of their own house. **The bill for withheld formation is not always presented by the people who were not formed. Sometimes it is presented by one's own children, and it is not experienced as a bill at all.**

A note on sources. Carpini's description of Mongol children is quoted from W. W. Rockhill's translation of *The Story of the Mongols Whom We Call the Tartars*, published with *The Journey of William of Rubruck to the Eastern Parts of the World, 1253–55* (Hakluyt Society, 1900), which is in the public domain; Rubruck's parallel description is from the same volume. Readers wanting fuller scholarly annotation should go to Peter Jackson's translation of Rubruck (Hakluyt Society, 1990), which is the preferred modern edition. Carpini reached Güyük's enthronement in 1246; Rubruck was at Möngke's court in 1253–55, and it is Rubruck who records Ariq Böke crossing himself and professing the divinity of the Messiah.

The *Secret History of the Mongols* is used here, as throughout this study, for what the imperial tradition held rather than as an independent record; it was composed for the ruling family and was not circulated, and the reading offered above — that its service anecdotes and its list of ninety-five commanders function as certification of appointments made against the grain of inherited standing — is this study's own and is offered to be argued with. The episodes referred to (Bo'orchu and the stolen geldings, Jelme brought in the cradle, Sorqan-shira concealing the fugitive, Shigi-qutuqu raised at the threshold, Jebe's confession after Köyiten) are all in the text.

The composition of the guard at 1206 — one thousand quiver-bearers, one thousand night guards, eight thousand day guards — and its recruitment from the sons and younger brothers of commanders of tens, hundreds, thousands and ten thousands, each bringing a stated retinue, follow the *Yuan shi* treatise as summarised in the reference literature, together with the guardsman's precedence over a commander of a thousand and the understanding of guard service as an honourable alternative to hostage-taking. The account of the *nerge* — seven men in ten summoned, three wings, the closing ring, the counted and shared kill — follows the standard secondary literature and is paraphrased. Tata-tonga's capture in 1204 and his teaching of the Uighur script to Mongol noble sons are attested in the imperial sources as reported in the scholarship on writing in the empire.

On Sorghaghtani Beki: her Kereit birth and Christianity, her administration of the Toluid appanage after Tolui's death in 1232, her patronage of mosques and madrasas and her cultivation of Buddhist and Daoist monks in her Chinese estates, and her attention to her sons' education, are reported in Juvayni and Rashid al-Din and follow the standard accounts. The caution that both those historians served princes descended from her is registered here and should be carried: hers is a reputation transmitted by her grandsons' employees. The arrangement of a Confucian tutor for Ariq Böke at Qubilai's instance, and Ariq Böke's failure to take to Chinese scholars as his brother had, are as given in the reference literature.

David Morgan's characterisation of the traditionalist position Ariq Böke came to represent — the drift toward softness, the centre remaining in Mongolia, the nomadic life preserved uncontaminated, China merely exploited — is paraphrased from *The Mongols* (2nd edn, 2007), pp. 104–105, and credited. It should be noted that the historiography of the Toluid civil war is contested, and that a serious modern line of argument holds Ariq Böke to have been Möngke's intended successor and Qubilai's accession a usurpation; nothing in this module's reading depends on which of them had the better claim.

Population figures are as given in this study's landscape and are ranges rather than counts: roughly seven hundred thousand nomads on the Mongolian grasslands against a Jin census of the order of fifty-three million.

The account of formation used here follows this project's paper *The Exploit*, and in particular its correction that people are not credulous but conditionally trusting, that the exploit satisfies vigilance rather than defeating it, and that the reason formation targets childhood is that adult vigilance is well defended against direct persuasion and cannot be stormed.

MODULE 5

Four Hundred Craftsmen

Module 5 · The Cost Column — why the ordinary man complied, run separately for the herder, the townsman, the peasant, the villager and the merchant; and why, in an order that could raise a soldier for nothing, a man's survival turned on whether his trade could be reproduced

Five men, five ledgers

The question this module answers is the plainest one in the framework: for the ordinary person under this order — not the commander, not the prince, the man with the animals or the plough or the loom — why did the sum come out in favour of compliance?

It comes out for one of four reasons, and usually a mixture. Because he was formed to believe the arrangement rightful and would be ashamed not to comply. Because he was actually getting something. Because someone could credibly reach him and make him pay if he did not. Or because there was nowhere to go. Where the belief is thick and the benefit real, the force can withdraw to the margins and the order is cheap. Where the belief is absent and the benefit thin, the cost has to be held high by visible force — and if exit is open as well, the arrangement is in trouble.

There is no single answer here, because "the ordinary man" under Mongol rule was at least five different men whose ledgers had almost nothing in common: a Mongol herder on the Kherlen; a townsman in Khorasan; a peasant in north China; a villager in the Rus' forest; and a merchant on the road between them. They were governed by one order and they were not in the same situation at all, and running them together produces an average that describes nobody.

One discipline first, because this is the part of the record most contaminated by later invention. Lists of "the laws of Genghis Khan" circulate in numbered clauses — sixteen, twenty-two, thirty-six — and most of them descend from eighteenth-century European compilations rather than from any thirteenth-century text; no Mongol code survives, and Juvayni is very nearly the only contemporary source for what the *jasaq* contained. The casualty figures are not counts and several exceed any plausible population of the city concerned. And the two best-known statements about ordinary life under the Mongols — the terror and the peace — come from the same pen. It was Juvayni who reported Chinggis in the pulpit at Bukhara calling himself the punishment of God, and Juvayni who wrote that a virgin carrying gold could cross the

empire unmolested. He was a Persian administrator in Mongol service, and he had reason to write both.

The herder: the one population where the belief was thick

Start with the Mongol himself, because he is the only person in the case for whom the ledger came out for compliance on both sides at once.

What he got. The previous century on the grasslands had been a condition in which nobody could keep an account against anybody: a man's wife could be carried off by a raiding party and the only remedy was to assemble enough friends to go and get her, which might take years and might fail. What the founding delivered, and delivered fast, was the end of that — one power on the steppe, no rival confederations, feud between Mongols abolished as a private activity. For a herding household the difference between a world of raids and a world without them is not an abstraction; it is whether the animals and the daughters are still there in the spring.

He also got a share. Plunder was pooled and distributed by decision of the centre rather than by his lord's favour, with the share of a man killed going to his family and to the orphans. That is a substantially better arrangement for a poor man than the aristocratic distribution it replaced, and it was one of the reasons the aristocrats hated it. And he got a career: the officer list of 1206 contains a blacksmith's son and a pardoned enemy archer, and every ordinary trooper knew it.

What he paid. Liability to serve, for every male from roughly fourteen to sixty, at his own expense, with his own horses and bow. The *qubchur*, a levy on his herds, which paid among other things for the relay post system. Collective punishment within his unit of ten, so that his neighbours were liable for him. And the rule that he could not move from the thousand he had been assigned to, on pain of death — which also meant he could not improve his position by finding a better lord, the standard steppe remedy since anyone could remember.

Whether he could leave. No. Not because the country was fenced, but because the founding had eliminated every rival to whom a defector could have gone. Leaving stopped being a transfer of allegiance and became vagrancy.

What he believed. Thickly, and the belief was not manufactured. He had been formed to it from infancy by a household that had also made him a rider and an archer; the order was visibly delivering; and the doctrine that Heaven had given the earth to the khan was being confirmed for him every year by the map. This is the only population in the case that reaches the cheap pole of the framework's gradient, where the governed hold the order up themselves and force withdraws to the margins. It is worth saying plainly that they reached it honestly.

The published price

Now the conquered, and the instrument that governed all of them.

The Mongol practice was to state the terms before the siege: submit, deliver tribute, supply men and provisions, and the city stands; resist, and it does not. That is a cost column *advertised in advance*, and it is rare enough to deserve close attention, because it does something that most coercive arrangements cannot.

The framework's usual finding is that terror is expensive — that an order which must terrorise is paying a recurring bill and revealing a belief that never took. Advertised terror inverts part of this. Its expense is incurred once, at a demonstration, and thereafter it functions as capital. A city that submits costs nothing to take: no siege train, no months in front of walls, no casualties, no winter in the field. So each destruction is not a running cost but an investment in the price of every subsequent negotiation, and the return is collected in all the sieges that never happen.

It also relocates the decision. In an ordinary conquest the besieger decides whether to storm. Here the *besieged* decide, from published terms, and they decide before the army arrives. The Mongols were not principally buying obedience with the destruction of Nishapur; they were buying the surrender of the next twenty towns, from people who had heard about it.

And the defect in it

A published price has one structural weakness and the record shows it operating.

The instrument contains a promise on both sides. The threat half is worthless without the offer half: if surrender does not save you, there is no reason to surrender.

At Merv in 1221, the governor offered to give up the city on condition that the population's lives be spared. Tolui agreed to the terms in order to end the siege, took the city, and then broke them: the whole population was driven onto the plain and killed, apart from a small number of children and **four hundred craftsmen**. Juvayni, writing decades later, reports that a cleric spent thirteen days counting the dead and reached a figure of 1,300,000; Ibn al-Athir gives 700,000 for Nishapur. Neither is a count and both are beyond any plausible population of the cities concerned; what is not in doubt is that the killing was systematic and enormous.

The consequence was exactly what the arithmetic predicts. Where the offer half was known to be worthless, cities fought to the end, and those sieges were the most expensive the Mongols fought. Gurganj held out for months and Juvayni records three thousand Mongol dead in a single failed assault on one bridge; Rashid al-Din attributes

the cost to the stubbornness of the defence. Nishapur had killed a son-in-law of the khan and could not buy terms at any price, so it fought.

A published cost column is a capital asset that depreciates every time the promise on the submission side is defaulted on. The depreciation is not paid by the party that defaults; it is paid at the next siege, by the men who have to storm the wall of a town that has concluded there is nothing to be gained by opening the gate.

The sorting was by trade

Four hundred craftsmen. The number recurs across the campaign in different forms and it is the module's central structural fact about the conquered.

At Merv the artisans were separated out and marched away; at Samarkand the systematic process after the surrender was massacre, enslavement, and *selection of craftspeople for deportation*; at Gurganj something on the order of a hundred thousand women, children and artisans were taken out of the general slaughter and sent east, with the surviving non-artisan males counted by severing an ear before being killed or enslaved; at Baghdad in 1258 artisans and engineers were again picked out and relocated. Boys and girls were counted off in tenths for the slave markets.

Read structurally rather than as a catalogue of horrors, that is a cost column **sorted by trade**, and the sorting variable is legible and consistent: your survival depended on whether the conquering order could reproduce your skill inside itself.

The Mongols could raise a soldier for nothing. The households did it, and every male on the grasslands arrived complete. What they could not produce at any price was a siege engineer, a goldsmith, a weaver of fine cloth, a maker of paper, a physician or a man who could build in stone — because a pastoral economy does not generate those skills and no amount of conquest teaches them. So the instrument was to take the men who held the irreproducible skills and move them bodily to where they were wanted, and to kill the men whose function — growing food, carrying goods, existing — the conquest did not need and could replace with the next province.

Two men in the same street were therefore at opposite ends of the gradient, and the thing that separated them was neither creed nor geography nor wealth. It was whether the conqueror had the skill at home.

The peasant of north China, whose life turned on an arithmetic

The north Chinese peasant's ledger was decided, at one point, in a room, by a calculation.

After the fall of the Jin capital, Mongol commanders proposed that the north be cleared of its farming population and turned to pasture — a proposal entirely consistent with steppe practice, which had no use for tilled ground and a great deal of use for grass. The Khitan official Yelü Chucai, a man of Liao imperial descent with a full Jin classical education who had entered Mongol service in 1218, argued against it on grounds that had nothing to do with mercy. He put the alternative in numbers: taxed rather than cleared, the region would yield in the order of 500,000 *liang* of silver, 80,000 bolts of silk and 400,000 *shi* of grain a year, and the coming war against the Song would need supplies. Ögedei took the argument. Tax offices were established in the ten circuits, independent of the military; household registers were kept and adjusted in 1235; the assessment on each adult male was reckoned in silk, commutable to silver.

This framework distinguishes two forks that an extraction can take. Where the thing taken is a *flow* — a harvest, a rent, a labour-day — the extractor needs the producer alive and tends toward an equilibrium just inside what the producer will bear. Where the thing taken is a *stock* — the ground itself, wanted for something else — there is no rate to tune and the logic runs toward removal. North China in 1230 was standing at that fork, and it went down the first road because a clerk demonstrated on paper that a living peasant out-yielded a pasture.

The peasant's resulting ledger: no belief whatever in the rightness of Mongol rule and no attempt made to install any; a tax on his person; corvée; a *darughachi* — a Mongol or Central Asian overseer — placed above every retained Chinese official; and, from the later 1230s and against Yelü Chucai's advice, the farming of the revenue to merchant syndicates who bid for the right to collect and then collected accordingly.

His exit was real but bad. He could run south to the Song, and enormous numbers did; he could go into banditry; he could disappear into the hills. The census figures for north China across this period fall very steeply, and while a large share of that fall is death, a large share is also flight and concealment. This is the honest limit on the Mongol cost column: the empire never built an apparatus capable of catching individual runaways across a countryside. It had terror and a register, and the register only worked on people who stayed to be counted.

The villager of Rus', whose tax collector was his own prince

The cheapest arrangement in the whole case was in the north-west, and it is cheap because the Mongols were barely in it.

After the conquest of the 1230s the Rus' principalities were not garrisoned in depth or administered directly. The princes were left in place, confirmed in office by the khan,

required to travel to Sarai and do homage, and obliged to apply for a written patent — a *yarlyk* — before succeeding. In return they delivered tribute and, when required, men. A census was imposed to establish the base: the numbering was extended to Novgorod, which had escaped the invasion, in 1257–59, and the tax was a levy on the head, collected by officers called *baskaki* going from house to house, payable in money or in furs, with those who could not pay liable to be sold.

The instrument that matters is who enforced it. Novgorod revolted against the numbering. The man who suppressed the revolt was Alexander Nevsky — the prince who had beaten the Swedes on the Neva and the Teutonic Knights on the ice, and who now came in person, had the ringleaders blinded and others' noses cut off, arrested his own son for supporting the resisters, and finally broke the city's refusal by threatening to leave and abandon it to the khan's vengeance. The registrars then went from house to house.

For the villager, therefore, the cost column was held by a man he had been formed since childhood to obey, in his own language, of his own faith, whose grandfather had ruled his grandfather. The Mongol does not appear in his field of vision at all in an ordinary year. This is the least expensive coercion available to any conqueror: the intermediary supplies the force, absorbs the hatred, and — if he does the job well enough to keep the punitive columns away — is remembered as a protector. Nevsky was canonised in 1547.

The corollary is the arrangement's fault line, and it should be recorded here rather than assumed. The one man in that chain who could have withdrawn was the prince. In 1262 several Rus' cities rose and killed the tax collectors, and Nevsky spent a year at Sarai persuading Berke not to send an expedition, and died on the journey home. An order that collects through an intermediary has put its cost column in someone else's hand, and it holds only as long as that hand keeps closing.

The merchant, who came out ahead

One class of non-Mongol did better under the empire than before it, and the framework requires that this be counted at full weight.

The relay post system, the *yam*, ran staging posts at intervals of a day's ride across the whole span, financed by the *qubchur* on the nomads' herds; the roads were policed; internal tolls were reduced or abolished across enormous distances that had previously been broken up among a dozen taxing authorities; merchants carrying a *paiza* travelled under imperial protection; and the *ortoq* partnerships gave merchant syndicates capital from Mongol princes and a share of the return. A caravan could move from north

China through Central Asia to the Black Sea under a single authority for the first time in recorded history.

This is not decoration on the analysis. For a long-distance trader the ledger genuinely came out in favour of the arrangement — better roads, fewer customs posts, one law, and a ruling class with a structural interest in his survival because it had lent him money. Juvayni's virgin with her gold dish is a rhetorical flourish written by a man in Mongol employment, and it should not be quoted as a description of conditions; but the thing it exaggerates was real, and the merchants who used the roads were not Mongols and were not being flattered into anything.

Exit, force and the ten

Pull the four conquered ledgers together and the enforcement architecture is visible.

The empire had no capacity to reach an individual runaway across a countryside, and it did not build one. What it had instead was four things that worked without needing to find anybody.

The first was the demonstration — the published price, which meant that most communities never tested the enforcement at all. The second was the register: a census converts a person into an entry and a village into a quota, and the quota is then owed by the village whether or not the individual is present, which transfers the job of finding him to his neighbours. The third was the rule against harbouring: the tradition consistently reports a capital prohibition on receiving or failing to return a fugitive, and while the clause cannot be quoted from any surviving code, the practice is corroborated by the behaviour of the order. And the fourth, cheapest and most continuous, was collective liability within the unit of ten — a man's absence was his nine comrades' problem before it was the khan's.

That last one is worth naming precisely, because it is not force at all. It is the coalitional pressure of the small group turned into an instrument of state: the enforcement is unpaid, permanent, exercised by people the subject cannot avoid, and it works through the machinery that makes exclusion from one's own group feel intolerable. No garrison in the world is that cheap.

Reading the cost column against the framework

Four contributions.

First, an advertised cost column is capital, and it depreciates on default. The framework's standing finding is that terror is expensive and is the tell of a belief that never took. This case shows a construction where terror is instead *published in advance*

as a price, and where it is therefore cheap — because its return is collected in the sieges that do not happen, and because it moves the decision from the besieger to the besieged. But the instrument has two halves, and the threat is worthless without the offer. **Every time the surrender terms are dishonoured, the asset loses value, and the loss is paid at the next wall by the men who have to climb it.** The diagnostic follows: where an order runs submit-or-be-destroyed, track whether the terms were kept, and expect the duration and cost of sieges to rise in the theatres where they were not. Merv surrendered on terms and was destroyed; Gurganj, downstream of that news, cost months and thousands.

Second, the cost column can be sorted by trade, and where it is, the sorting variable is reproducibility. This framework already holds that the split between full and empty cost columns can run by caste as readily as by geography. The Mongol case supplies a cleaner variable than caste: **a subject's position on the gradient tracked whether the conquering order could produce his skill itself.** The Mongols could raise a soldier at zero cost and could not raise a siege engineer or a weaver at any cost, so the engineers and the weavers were extracted alive and moved, and the rest were treated as replaceable. This predicts better than creed, wealth or region, it explains why two men in one street had opposite fates, and it should be tested against other conquests where the conqueror's own economy is narrow.

Third, the cheapest cost column is one held by an intermediary the subject was already formed to obey. In Rus' the Mongols spent almost nothing on holding several million people: no village garrisons, no Mongol face at the door, a census taken and a prince made responsible for the return. The prince supplied the violence, absorbed the resentment, and where he performed well was remembered by his own people as their protector rather than as the khan's collector. **The corollary is that such an order's real fault line is the intermediary's own ledger, because he is the only person in the arrangement with the standing to stop** — and the record duly shows the rising of 1262 aimed at the collectors, and the prince spending his last year talking a khan out of a punitive expedition.

Fourth, the concession the module owes. This was not an order that gave nobody anything. For the Mongol herder the benefit was large and the belief genuine, and the framework's cheap pole was actually reached — the peace of the grasslands after a century of raiding is a real good delivered to real people, and it should not be dissolved into the ledger of the empire's victims. For the long-distance merchant the roads, the abolished tolls and the single jurisdiction were also real. What the case shows is not an order that extracted from everyone, but one that **gave a great deal to two narrow populations and almost nothing to the rest — and held the rest by having**

demonstrated, in advance and at a scale nobody could ignore, what the alternative cost. Both halves belong in the accounting, and neither cancels the other.

A note on sources. This module's subject is the part of the Mongol record most heavily contaminated by later reconstruction, and the discipline is stated in the text rather than hidden here. No Mongol law code survives; the numbered clause-lists of "the laws of Genghis Khan" that circulate widely descend chiefly from eighteenth-century European compilations, and David Ayalon's demonstration that the most-quoted account of the *yasa* was taken by Maqrizi from al-Umari and through him from Juvayni leaves Juvayni as very nearly the sole contemporary source. The prohibition on harbouring or failing to return a fugitive is therefore reported here as attested tradition corroborated by practice, and is not quoted as a statute.

Casualty figures are given as the chroniclers give them and none is a count. Juvayni's report of a cleric counting the dead at Merv for thirteen days and reaching 1,300,000, and Ibn al-Athir's estimate of 700,000 at Nishapur, are recorded with the caution that both exceed any plausible population of the cities concerned. The surrender of Merv on terms and Tolui's breaking of those terms, the sparing of about four hundred craftsmen and some children, the selection and deportation of craftspeople at Samarkand, the sparing of roughly one hundred thousand women, children and artisans at Gurganj with the severing of ears as a tally on the remaining males, Juvayni's report of three thousand Mongol dead in one failed assault at Gurganj, and the selection of artisans and engineers at Baghdad in 1258, all follow the standard secondary literature on the campaigns, paraphrased. The practice of driving captives forward at sieges is attested by Barthold among others.

On north China: Yelü Chucai's Liao descent, Jin education and entry into Mongol service in 1218; the proposal to convert the north to pasture and his counter-argument; the revenue figures of the order of 500,000 *liang* of silver, 80,000 bolts of silk and 400,000 *shi* of grain; the establishment of tax offices independent of military control; the retention and adjustment of household registers in 1235; the assessment of the adult male in silk commutable to silver; the *darughachi* placed over retained officials; and the subsequent farming of revenue to merchant syndicates against his advice — all follow the standard accounts of the period and the recent scholarship on Yelü Chucai's career, paraphrased and credited. It should be noted that his reputation rests substantially on the *Yuan shi*, a dynastic history written by his employers' successors.

On Rus': the confirmation of princes in office, the requirement of homage at Sarai and of a *yarlyk* before succession, the census extended to Novgorod in 1257–59, the collection of the poll tax by *baskaki* house to house in money or furs, the sale of those unable to pay, Alexander Nevsky's suppression of the Novgorod resistance including

the blinding and mutilation of ringleaders and the arrest of his own son, the risings of 1262 against the collectors, his final embassy to Berke and his death on the return in 1263, and his canonisation in 1547, follow the standard literature on the period, paraphrased. Nevsky's role is contested in the historiography and this module takes no position on his motives.

On the herder's ledger: the *qubchur* levy on herds financing the relay system, liability to service for males from roughly fourteen to sixty, the pooling and central distribution of plunder with the dead man's share to his family, the prohibition on transfer between units and collective liability within the unit of ten, are as established in this study's earlier treatment of the founding and follow the same sources.

Juvayni's remark that a virgin carrying gold could cross the empire unmolested is a rhetorical flourish by a Persian administrator in Mongol employment and is presented as such rather than as evidence of conditions; the same author supplied the Bukhara "punishment of God" speech, and the coincidence is noted in the text as a caution rather than as an argument.

MODULE 6

One Sheep from Every Hundred

Module 6 · Extraction — how a levy that began as a whip-round among herdsmen, assessed in animals and carrying a clause for the poor, kept its name for forty years while turning into a head tax in coin on peasants who held none; and the running fight between the men who counted and the men who bid

Before there was a tax there was a division of spoils

The founding did not extract. It took.

The revenue of the order in its first two decades was plunder — herds, goods, silver, silk and people, seized in campaign and pooled at the centre for distribution afterwards by decision rather than by the taker's own hand. That arrangement had real virtues for the ordinary soldier: the share was fixed by rule, the dead man's share went to his family, and nobody's lord stood between him and it.

But plunder is a stock and not a rate. It cannot be tuned, eased back or budgeted against, and it arrives only where the frontier is moving. An order whose whole income is spoil has a structural requirement built into its balance sheet before anybody has thought about policy: it must keep conquering, or it must find something else. The history of Mongol extraction is the history of finding something else, conducted by men who had never run a treasury, over populations who had been paying taxes for two thousand years.

The first tax was a whip-round

The word that would eventually name a head tax on Persian peasants begins its recorded life as an act of friendship.

The Mongol tradition has Temüjin, long before the founding, levying a *qubchur* on his own followers in order to help his patron To'oril of the Kereit, who was in financial difficulty. That is not a tax in any sense a fiscal historian would recognise. It is a collection taken up among a chief's own men for a purpose they could all see, from people who could all count what they were giving.

Its first appearance as a standing instrument is at the assembly of 1235, and the decree survives in the Mongols' own account, in the mouth of Ögedei:

"Let them contribute one three-year-old sheep each year from [their] herds to make [my] soup. Let them contribute one sheep from [every] hundred to the poor and needy within their own [military district]."

The same decree goes on to order that the thousands supply mares in rotation so that kumiss need not be levied ad hoc every time the princes assembled; that storehouses be built and stocked with satins, silver ingots, quivers, bows and armour, with keepers appointed; that pastures be allotted; that wells be dug and fenced in the desert country; and that relay posts be established with fixed quotas of post-horses, sheep for provisions, milch mares, oxen and carts, so that messengers would stop galloping across people's camps and disrupting them. The penalty announced for pilfering from the quota is savage and specific.

Two things in this are worth stopping on.

The first is that Ögedei sent the whole package to his elder brother Chaghatai for approval before enacting it, because Chaghatai was the elder, and the text records Chaghatai's reply approving it and offering to extend the relay line to meet his own and to get Batu to join his to it. A tax decree of the Great Khan of the Mongols was submitted for a brother's assent, and the assent was recorded. That is a constitutional fact and it belongs here rather than in an account of the succession, because it shows what the fiscal authority of the centre actually rested on: agreement among a small number of men who each commanded armies.

The second is the shape of the levy itself. It is assessed **in animals, on people who have animals**, at a rate any herder can compute standing in his own flock. It carries a redistributive clause — one beast in a hundred for the poor and needy — and the redistribution is explicitly **within their own district**, so the transfer never leaves the community that produced it. And it is paired, in the same decree, with the construction of the thing the levy pays for, the relay system, whose stated purpose is to stop official travellers from imposing on ordinary households.

Measured against anything else in this collection, that is a remarkably benign fiscal instrument, and the reason is structural rather than moral. It was levied on the one population whose belief the order actually needed.

The same word, travelling

Now follow the word.

Around 1252 Möngke reissued the original edict and added an exemption: anyone owning fewer than a hundred animals in a given category paid nothing. Still a levy in

kind, still on herders, still computable by the payer, and now with a floor beneath which the poor were untouched.

By the later thirteenth century, *qubchur* is the name of the capitation levied on the settled populations of Iran, assessed at something in the order of seven dinars per taxable adult male, with religious figures exempted and the assessment resting on household-by-household registers. In Rus' the corresponding levy was collected by officers going door to door and payable in money or in furs, with those who could not pay liable to be sold. In north China the adult male's assessment was reckoned in silk, commutable to silver.

The framework's sharpest test on any tax instrument is not the rate, not the base and not the preamble. It is **what will be accepted in satisfaction of it** — because a levy in kind on a producer of that kind is revenue, while a levy in coin on a household that holds no coin is something else entirely, and the difference is invisible to anyone reading the decree.

Follow the arithmetic from the Persian villager's side. He owes seven dinars a year. He does not have seven dinars and never has. There are three places to get them: sell produce, borrow, or work for somebody who has coin. All three route him into a market and a set of relationships he did not choose — and, as the next section shows, the man he is most likely to borrow from is frequently connected to the syndicate that bought the right to collect from him.

Nobody has been compelled to do anything. The compulsion has been moved out of the decree and into the household's arithmetic, where it is invisible to the man in Karakorum confirming his uncle's forty-year-old order about sheep.

And this is the mechanism worth naming: a levy that keeps its name while changing its medium has become a different tax, and the name conceals the change from the people administering it. No one had to decide to convert a herd levy into a head tax on ploughmen. The word did the work. Each successive khan was confirming a decree whose wording had not altered.

What else came off the top

Beside the capitation ran the commercial tax, the *tamgha*. Rashid al-Din puts it at ten per cent, levied on the roads and in the ports — replacing, in the Islamic lands, the canonical *zakat* levied at two and a half. That is a fourfold increase on trade, imposed by an order usually credited with being good for merchants, and both facts are true at once.

Then the levies that never appear in a schedule because they were not assessed at all. *Tagar*, the requisition of food to provision an army on the move. *Qalan*, associated

with the obligation to supply men. *Ulagh*, the provision of post-horses and transport. And beneath those, the ordinary predation of anyone travelling under authority: the messengers, the officials, and above all the merchants carrying imperial tablets, who could demand mounts, lodging and goods from the households they passed.

We know this last was serious because of what had to be done about it. Among Möngke's reforms after 1251 was an express prohibition on merchants demanding goods and services from civilian populations, together with punishment of unauthorised plundering by generals and princes — including, the record specifies, his own son. Rulers do not legislate against practices nobody is engaged in. The unassessed levies were frequently heavier than the assessed ones, and they fell without warning, without record, and without any possibility of appeal.

The farm

The most consequential fiscal instrument of the period is not a tax. It is a contract.

The *ortoq* — the word is Turkic for partner — were merchants who took capital from Mongol princes, khatuns and the treasury and traded or lent with it on agreed shares. The arrangements were sophisticated: the recent scholarship shows contractual features closely resembling the *mudaraba*, *qirad* and *commenda* of the Islamic and Mediterranean worlds, with worked-out allocations of liability between the investor and the working partner. Ögedei invested in them personally and heavily. Marco Polo's family were in this business.

Trading was the first line. The second was buying the right to collect.

A tax farm works by a simple arithmetic that has been reinvented in every empire that ever ran short of clerks. The farmer offers the treasury a fixed sum, payable now or on a schedule; in exchange he receives the right to collect a specified revenue in a specified place; and he keeps whatever he takes above his bid. The treasury gets certainty and immediacy, and is spared the cost of an assessment apparatus. The farmer gets a licence and an incentive.

In north China the assessment Yelü Chucai had built — the tax offices in the ten circuits, independent of the military, the household registers kept and adjusted, the adult male assessed in silk — was a knowledge machine, and it produced revenue in the order of half a million *liang* of silver a year. It was outbid. A merchant named Abd al-Rahman offered to **double** the annual silver payment, and the collection was transferred to him. He had not discovered a new resource; he had simply named a larger number, and the difference would be collected from the same peasants by whatever means were required.

Then the arrangement reached its logical end. During the regency of Töregene after Ögedei's death, Abd al-Rahman received **blank forms bearing the imperial seal**, so that he could issue decrees at his own discretion on the Mongol court's behalf.

That is worth stating without ornament. The state had sold the collection; then it had sold the paperwork; and the man holding the paperwork was the man whose income was the difference between what he had promised and what he could take.

What a farm actually purchases

The framework has a finding from another case that this one is well placed to test: **a revenue farm buys ignorance along with predictability**, because an assessment cannot be conducted without generating knowledge of the country, and a farm replaces all of that with a single figure.

The Mongol case confirms it, and permits a refinement.

Consider what an assessment requires. Somebody must go to the village. He must count the households, the adult males, the fields, the animals and the trees. He must know what a normal harvest looks like there, so as to know when a claim of failure is true. He must know who has died and who has fled. That information is expensive to gather, has to be refreshed, and is the only basis on which a ruler can answer the question that actually governs an extractive order — *how much can be taken here without wrecking the place?*

A farm answers that question with a bid. And the bid is not an estimate of the country's capacity; it is an estimate of the farmer's collecting power. Once the assessment machinery is gone, it cannot be conjured back when needed, because the men who knew have dispersed and the registers have gone stale, and rebuilding takes a decade.

So the refinement is this: **the ignorance is not a side-effect of the farm. It is a substantial part of what is being bought.** A ruler who farms is purchasing a fixed number *and* release from the obligation to know anything — and the second is attractive precisely because knowing is slow, expensive, staffed by men one does not trust, and produces answers one may not like. Yelü Chucai's answer was five hundred thousand. Abd al-Rahman's was a million. A ruler who has abolished his own assessment cannot tell which of those is a fact and which is a promise, and that is the condition the farm places him in permanently.

The counter-instrument, and the fight

Against the farm the empire ran the most ambitious counting operation of the medieval world.

North China was registered in 1235. Rus' was numbered across the 1240s and 1250s, the enumeration reaching Novgorod in 1257–59. Armenia was counted in 1254. And from 1252 to 1259 Möngke ran an enumeration across the whole empire — north China, Central Asia, Rus', Iran, Afghanistan, Georgia, Armenia — which recorded not only households but **men aged fifteen to sixty, fields, livestock, vineyards and orchards**.

That is not a tax roll. It is a survey of productive capacity, and it is the exact instrument a farm makes unnecessary. It tells the centre what each district holds, which means it can set a rate rather than accept a bid, allocate men rather than request them, and detect the difference between a district that cannot pay and one that will not.

Möngke's programme around it is legible as one policy. He made merchants themselves liable to commercial and property tax, ending their exemption. He prohibited the requisitioning of goods and services from civilians. He punished plundering by his own commanders and princes. He established a Department of Monetary Affairs in 1253 to control the issue of paper money, which had been over-issued since Ögedei's reign. He honoured the drafts that Güyük and other elites had drawn on merchants, paying the debts of a dead khan rather than repudiating them. And he reissued the herd levy with a floor beneath which nobody paid.

Every one of those measures does the same thing: it takes revenue back out of private hands and puts it on a schedule the centre knows the contents of. It is a khan buying his way back to knowing, and it was expensive.

The census was also, from below, hated. The counting itself provoked risings — in the western districts, and most visibly at Novgorod, where the population had to be beaten into submitting to the registrars by their own prince. That is worth registering, because it means the two instruments were not experienced by the subject as one benign and one predatory. A farm arrives as a demand; a census arrives as a stranger writing your children's names in a book. The subject can see that the second is worse in the long run, and he is right.

What decided which instrument was in use

Set the swings out in order and a pattern appears that is not about anybody's fiscal philosophy.

Under Ögedei, who needed money continuously for campaigns on three fronts, the assessment was built and then substantially sold. Under Töregene's regency — a woman holding a throne for a son whose election was not secure, who needed money and allies immediately — the farm reached its extreme form, with the sealed blanks. Under Möngke, who had just taken the throne by a coup that destroyed a rival branch of the family and needed the arrangement to hold for a generation, the counting resumed on a scale never attempted before.

The farm is the instrument of a ruler with a short horizon. The census is the instrument of a ruler with a long one. A farm converts future revenue into present cash and destroys the capacity to know; a census spends present cash to build a capacity that pays later. Which one a treasury reaches for is therefore a readout of how long its master expects to be there.

And here the case delivers something structural rather than biographical, because the Mongol succession arrangement — a lineage of eligible claimants, an assembly that must be convened across thousands of kilometres, a throne vacant for years at a time — **manufactures short horizons on a schedule.** Every interregnum puts power in the hands of someone whose position is provisional and whose need is immediate. So an order built like this one will drift toward revenue farming as a matter of structure, regardless of the preferences of anybody in it, and will only drift back when a khan arrives who is both secure and long-sighted. Möngke was that khan, and he was dead within eight years.

Reading extraction against the framework

Four contributions.

First, confirmation with a sharpened statement of the mechanism. A revenue farm buys ignorance along with predictability — and the ignorance is not incidental damage but a substantial part of the purchase. What a farming ruler acquires is a fixed number *and* release from the duty to know, and the second is attractive precisely because assessment is slow, costly, staffed by men he cannot verify, and liable to return an answer smaller than the one a bidder will offer. The diagnostic follows: **where a farm displaces an existing assessment, look for a bid that exceeded the assessment, and read the excess as the price of the ruler's ignorance rather than as a discovery of new revenue.** Abd al-Rahman's doubling was not a new resource. It was the same peasants, and a larger number.

Second — and this is the case's principal contribution — the farm and the census have opposite time signatures, and which of them an order is running is a readout of its ruler's horizon. Farm: cash now, no apparatus, no knowledge, capacity

consumed. Census: cash later, expensive apparatus, knowledge, capacity preserved. This is testable in any order that used both, and the method is simply to date the swings and see what else is happening on those dates. Here the swings land on the successions. **An order whose succession is contested and slow will drift toward farming as a structural matter**, because every interregnum installs a ruler whose horizon has been shortened for him.

Third, a levy that keeps its name while changing its medium has become a different tax, and the name hides the change from the men administering it. *Qubchur* went from one beast in a hundred, levied on herders who could compute it standing in their own flock and paired with a poor-relief clause, to a fixed sum of coin per adult male in countries where the ordinary household held no coin — and it did so without any single decision to convert it, because each khan was confirming a decree whose wording had not altered. **The corpus should add this to the medium-of-payment test: ask not only what will be accepted in satisfaction of the levy, but whether the answer has changed while the name stayed the same, because that is a conversion nobody has to authorise and nobody notices.**

Fourth, on the poor-relief clause, which is real and should be counted precisely. One sheep in a hundred for the poor and needy, distributed *within their own military district*, is a genuine redistributive provision and an unusual one; this collection does not often find a conquest order legislating for its indigent. But note exactly whom it covered. It covered Mongols, inside the units they belonged to, at the expense of other Mongols. Nothing remotely comparable ever ran toward the conquered, who received the capitation without the floor and the requisition without the schedule. **The order's welfare provision and its extraction ran in opposite directions along the same line, and the line was the boundary of the population whose belief it needed.** That is not hypocrisy and should not be written as such. It is the ordinary shape of an arrangement in which one population's compliance is bought and everyone else's is taken.

A note on sources. Ögedei's fiscal decree is quoted from Urgunge Onon's translation of the *Secret History of the Mongols* (§279–280), briefly and credited; the same passages contain the provision of mares in rotation, the storehouses, the digging of wells in the Chöl country, the establishment of the relay posts with fixed quotas and the penalty for pilfering, and the submission of the whole package to Chaghatai for approval with his recorded assent and his offer to extend the line to Batu's. The earlier levying of a *qubchur* by Temüjin on his own followers to assist To'oril is at §151 and in Rashid al-Din. The chain of the levy — its origin as a nomadic contribution, Ögedei's decree of 1235 at one beast in a hundred plus one for the poor, Möngke's reissue around 1252

with exemption for owners of fewer than a hundred animals in a category, and its later form as a capitation of about seven dinars per taxable adult male in Ilkhanid Iran with religious figures exempted — follows the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article on *qopchur* and the recent scholarship on Ilkhanid census-taking, paraphrased and credited. As always in this study, the *Secret History* is used for what the imperial tradition held rather than as an independent record.

The *tamgha* at ten per cent, replacing *zakat* at two and a half in the Islamic lands, is as reported by Rashid al-Din and summarised in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article on customs duties; Ghazan's later reduction and partial abolition of it is noted there and lies beyond this study's bounds. *Tagar*, *qalan* and the requisition of post-horses and transport follow the standard literature on Mongol fiscal terminology, which records regional variation in the names against a stable structure.

On the *ortoq*: the partnership form, the advancing of capital by Mongol principals, the profit-sharing and liability arrangements, and their resemblance to *mudaraba*, *qirad*, *inan* and *commenda*, follow Enerelt Enkhbold's work on Mongol–ortoq partnerships (*Central Asian Survey*, 2019), paraphrased. Ögedei's personal investment in ortoq enterprises, the transfer of the north Chinese revenue to Abd al-Rahman on his promise to double the annual silver, and Töregene's issue to him of blank forms bearing the imperial seal, follow the standard accounts and the recent scholarship on Yelü Chucai's career as recorded in the *Yuan shi*; the last detail is reported in that literature and is given here as it stands there.

On the censuses: the north Chinese registration of 1235, the Rus' countings culminating at Novgorod in 1257–59, the Armenian census of 1254, and Möngke's empire-wide enumeration of 1252–59 recording households, males aged fifteen to sixty, fields, livestock, vineyards and orchards, follow the standard literature, above all Thomas Allsen's *Mongol Imperialism: The Policies of the Grand Qan Möngke in China, Russia, and the Islamic Lands, 1251–1259* (Berkeley, 1987), which is the work a reader should go to for this module's central subject. Möngke's associated measures — merchants made liable to commercial and property taxes, the prohibition on requisitioning goods and services from civilians, the punishment of unauthorised plundering by commanders and princes including his own son, the Department of Monetary Affairs of 1253, and the honouring of drafts drawn on merchants by his predecessors — follow the same literature, paraphrased.

Revenue figures are reported as the sources give them and none is audited: the order of 500,000 *liang* of silver, 80,000 bolts of silk and 400,000 *shi* of grain attributed to Yelü Chucai's assessment is from the *Yuan shi* tradition, and Abd al-Rahman's offer to

double it is likewise. The reading of the swing between farming and counting as a function of the ruler's horizon is this study's own and is offered to be argued with.

MODULE 7

I Shrank from Recording It

Module 7 · Information and Suppression — an order that built the fastest news system in the world to hear with, suppressed almost nothing of what was said about it, needed the worst reports of itself to travel and to grow in the telling, and got its terror published for nothing by the people it had terrorised

Two directions

Most orders this collection has examined have one information problem, and it runs inward. A distant power does something to a subject population that its own citizens would not tolerate seeing plainly, and the whole apparatus — the confidential report, the buried despatch, the official painting, the suppressed newspaper — exists to stop the two ends of the arrangement from meeting. The seam is policed against the home audience's own eyes.

The Mongol order had no home audience in that sense. The conquerors and the metropole were the same few hundred thousand people, most of whom had personally been present, and there was no public whose conscience had to be managed and no press to manage it with.

So the information problem ran the other way, and its shape is the inversion this module exists to record. The audience the order most needed to reach was the population it had **not yet conquered**; the message it needed delivered was what happened to those who resisted; and the message needed to be not smaller than the truth but larger. An order whose floor is priced by reputation has an interest in publication, not concealment. That is a genuinely different information regime, and it produced a genuinely different apparatus: a superb machine for hearing, almost nothing for censoring, and a body of atrocity literature written, at no cost to the conqueror, by the conquered.

The machine for hearing

The *yam* — in Mongolian *örtöö*, a change of horses — was a chain of relay stations set along the imperial routes at intervals of roughly twenty to forty miles, calibrated to what a steppe pony could do before it needed rest. At each station stood spare mounts, fodder, provisions and shelter, with keepers and horse-keepers supplied by the thousands of the district and quotas fixed by decree. A courier rode a stage at full speed,

handed on, and rested while a fresh man and a fresh horse carried the message forward, so that the information moved continuously while no individual carried it far. Marco Polo, who saw the mature system, describes stations of two to four hundred horses, clerks logging the hour of each arrival and departure, and messengers strapping bands around head, chest and stomach to keep themselves in the saddle.

The speeds reported are extraordinary and should be treated as reports rather than measurements: two hundred to two hundred and fifty miles in a day for urgent traffic, with night riding slowed by the need to carry a torch. Even discounted heavily, this is the fastest sustained communication in the world before the telegraph, and it is the physical precondition for governing from the Onon to the Danube.

Access was by *paiza* — a tablet of wood, silver or gold according to the bearer's standing, which certified his right to requisition. And around the relay ran the rest of the empire's intake: merchants used as scouts, prisoners systematically interrogated, defectors welcomed and questioned, and local guides recruited before every campaign. The Ongut chief who showed Chinggis the road into the Jin lands in 1211 is the type of the arrangement.

It is worth naming what the yam actually was, because the postal framing understates it. It was a **listening apparatus**. Its function was to bring the centre a continuous picture of where its armies were, what its governors were doing, which frontier was moving and which had stopped — and the empire's cohesion for fifty years is very largely a fact about that apparatus rather than about anybody's loyalty.

The tell in the relay: whoever can requisition, will

The yam also demonstrates a rule that applies to every information system a state builds, and the record here is unusually explicit about it.

The relay was paid for out of the herd levy and by the households of the districts it crossed, who supplied the keepers, the mounts, the sheep for provisions, the milch mares and the carts. Anyone holding a *paiza* could draw on all of it. And since a tablet conferred the power to take horses, food and lodging from whoever was nearest, the tablet became the most valuable object in the empire and was issued accordingly — by princes, by khatuns, by commanders, to their clients and their business partners.

The consequences arrive in the legislation. Ögedei had to prohibit the nobility from issuing *paizas* and decrees at all, reserving the power to the centre. Möngke, a generation later, had to bar the khan's own merchant partners from using the relay stations and the tablets, and to send imperial investigators to supervise them, and to forbid merchants from demanding goods and services from civilian populations outright.

An information system that runs on requisition is also an extraction system, and it will be captured by whoever can obtain the credential. The Mongols built the finest communications network of the age and then spent forty years trying to stop their own relatives and creditors from using it as a licence to live off the country.

The outflow: what the order wanted said about itself

Now the inversion.

The framework's standing account of terror is that it is expensive — a recurring bill, and the tell of a belief that never took. This study has already found that advertised terror behaves differently: published in advance as a price, it functions as capital, because the return is collected in the sieges that never have to be fought.

Capital of that kind has one requirement. It must be **published**, in vivid and memorable form, to people who have not seen it. And what the Mongol record shows is an order that was entirely content for the reports of its own atrocities to circulate, to be believed, and to grow.

Consider the material as a body of publication rather than as a body of evidence.

Juvayni says of Nishapur, destroyed in 1221 after a defender's arrow killed a son-in-law of the khan, that not even cats and dogs were spared and the site was sown with barley. That is not a casualty estimate. It is an image, and it is constructed to travel — total, memorable, repeatable in one sentence by a frightened man in the next city.

Then the figures. Juvayni gives 1,747,000 for Nishapur and reports a cleric spending thirteen days counting the dead at Merv to arrive at 1,300,000. Ibn al-Athir gives 700,000 for Nishapur. Hamdallah Mustawfi, writing in 1330, gives 800,000 for Baghdad. Modern estimates for Nishapur run in the range of one to two hundred thousand, and several of the medieval figures exceed any plausible population of the cities concerned. David Morgan's judgement is that they are not statistical information at all but evidence of a state of mind; Jack Weatherford calls them preposterous; George Lane holds that the Mongols deliberately exaggerated and encouraged the horror stories that preceded them.

And then the item that settles the question of whether the inflation served the conqueror. **Hülegü, writing in his own name to Louis IX of France, claimed two hundred thousand — in some renderings two million — killed at Baghdad.**

A ruler concealing an atrocity does not write to a foreign king to report its scale. A ruler who inflates his own body count in his own diplomatic correspondence has told you what the number is for. It is not a record. It is a price list.

Who did the publishing

Here is the part the framework has not had before, and it is a mechanism rather than an anecdote.

The Mongols did not run a propaganda apparatus. They had no press, no pamphlets, no scriptorium, no clerks of their own writing in the languages of the people they wanted frightened. The publication was done by the victims, and by the collaborators, and both had reasons that pushed the same way.

Take the victim's historian first. Ibn al-Athir of Mosul, born in 1160, wrote his universal history up to 1231 and died two years later. He had not met a Mongol. His information came from refugees passing through Iraq. And he opens his account of the invasion with one of the most remarkable statements of authorial reluctance in medieval literature:

> *"For some years I continued averse from mentioning this event, deeming it so horrible that I shrank from recording it and ever withdrawing one foot as I advanced the other. To whom, indeed, can it be easy to write the announcement of the death-blow of Islam and the Muslims, or who is he on whom the remembrance thereof can weigh lightly? O would that my mother had not born me or that I had died and become a forgotten thing ere this befell! Yet, withal, a number of my friends urged me to set it down in writing, and I hesitated long, but at last came to the conclusion that to omit this matter could serve no useful purpose."*

And then, having overcome the reluctance, he writes this:

> *"I say, therefore, that this thing involves the description of the greatest catastrophe and the most dire calamity which befell all men generally, and the Muslims in particular; so that, should one say that the world, since God Almighty created Adam until now, has not been afflicted with the like thereof, he would but speak the truth... For even the Antichrist will spare such as follow him, though he destroy those who oppose him, but these Mongols spared none."*

Read that as a positioned statement rather than as a report and its logic is visible. A defeat is a reproach to the order that suffered it. A defeat unprecedented since the creation of Adam, worse than the Antichrist, is not a reproach — it is a cataclysm, outside the ordinary scale on which armies and governments are judged, and no one is at fault for failing to withstand it. **The victim's chronicler needs the calamity to be maximal, because a merely large defeat would indict his own side.** He is not lying; he is reaching, honestly, for the only scale on which what has happened can be borne.

Now the collaborator's historian. Juvayni was a Persian of a scribal family who served the Mongols and was later placed in Hülegü's service and made governor of Baghdad. His thesis was that the conquests were God's punishment of the Muslims for their sins and that the wise course was to accept Mongol authority. **He needed the calamity to be maximal too, and for the mirror-image reason: only a divine visitation could make his own employment something other than treason.** A man who has taken office under an ordinary conqueror is a collaborator. A man who has taken office under the punishment of God is submitting to providence.

Both men had every reason to make the number enormous. Neither was in the conqueror's pay for this purpose. And the conqueror paid nothing, commissioned nothing, and had only to refrain from contradicting it — which he did, and then improved on it in his own letters.

A conqueror can outsource his terror-publishing to the population he has terrorised, and their incentives will do the work more thoroughly than his own could. That is this module's principal contribution, and it stands beside the finding from the study of the robe that the same class also supplied his legitimating doctrine for nothing. It was Juvayni who reported Chinggis in the pulpit at Bukhara calling himself the punishment of God, Juvayni who counted the dead at Merv, and Juvayni who wrote that a virgin carrying gold could cross the empire unmolested. The terror, the theology and the peace all come from one pen, and it belonged to a Persian civil servant.

The suppression that was not there

Turn to the other valve — what the order stopped from being said — and there is remarkably little to report. The absence is itself the finding and should be stated plainly rather than passed over.

There was no index of prohibited books, no heresy tribunal, no censorship office, no licensing of preachers, no political police among the conquered populations. Ibn al-Athir wrote that the Mongols were worse than the Antichrist, in Mosul, in the shadow of a Mongol army in Azerbaijan, and died in his bed. The clergy of four religions were on the payroll and were not told what to preach. No Persian was punished for lamenting the conquest in verse; the lamentation is one of the largest bodies of literature the period produced.

The framework's explanation for this is available and correct. Suppression is what an order does when it needs a population's belief and a rival account threatens it. This order did not need the conquered's belief and never sought it. What a Persian thought about Mongol rule was of no operational interest so long as the tribute arrived, and an

uninteresting fact is safer than a censored one. **Where there is no attempt to form a population, there is usually no need to censor it, and the absence of a censorship apparatus should not be read as tolerance.** It is indifference with the same appearance.

The suppression that was there ran inward and upward

What was controlled was information *inside* the order, and there the record is sharp.

The law was kept secret. The *jasaq* was never published. There was no copy a subject could consult, no promulgation, no posted text; the standard modern assessment is that its secrecy was functional, because decrees that are not public can be modified and applied selectively. This deserves to be stated as a technique rather than treated as a source problem, which is how it is usually handled. **A rule nobody has been shown cannot be cited against the man who applies it, and can be revised without ever being amended.** It is the outflow valve in its purest available form: not the suppression of a rival account, but the withholding of the standard by which the ruler's own conduct might be measured.

The dynastic record was kept secret. The *Secret History* was composed for the ruling family and not circulated; the Chinese translators called it secret for that reason. The most formative text the order produced was addressed to a few hundred people.

And the one rival interpreter inside the order was destroyed. Teb-tenggeri, the shaman Kököchü, had declared by Heaven's decree that Temüjin should be Chinggis Khan. He then accumulated a following — the tradition says the people of the nine tongues gathered around him until his gathering outnumbered the khan's — humiliated the khan's brothers, and told the khan that Heaven had given contradictory omens about which brother should hold the nation. He was killed in the khan's own tent, by prearrangement, his spine broken, and the killing was afterwards explained as Heaven's own verdict: he had laid hands on the khan's brothers and spread slander, and so was not loved by Heaven and had been carried off.

Note precisely what that was. A man who could speak for Heaven independently of the khan was the only person in the order capable of delegitimating him. He was removed, and the removal was itself narrated as a message from the same Heaven.

The seam that ended up crowded, by accident

The framework holds that the trusted-information position is structural: it cannot be emptied, only occupied, crowded or captured, and that destroying its occupant usually clears the ground for a more captured successor.

Here it was destroyed and the Mongols never refilled it themselves. After Tebtenggeri no shaman held comparable standing, and no Mongol clerical class was ever built — no scripture, no seminary, no order of priests, nothing.

The vacancy was filled instead by **rented interpreters from four foreign religions and three foreign bureaucratic traditions**: Uighur scribes who supplied the script, Khitan Confucians who supplied the fiscal apparatus, Persian and Khwarazmian secretaries who supplied the accounting, Nestorian clergy, Buddhist monks, Daoist masters and Muslim jurists, all exempt from tax and all praying for the khan.

The result is a seam that is *crowded* rather than captured — which is what this framework calls the whole of the available liberty, since a chokepoint held by many competing hands is one that can be checked, and a chokepoint held by one hand is foreclosure.

But it was not built for liberty and nobody in it valued plurality. It was crowded because the conqueror had destroyed his own interpreter and had to hire four replacements from populations that did not agree with one another, and because he could not afford to let any one of them become the only voice at his ear. The plurality was a by-product of poverty in a particular resource.

And there was a price, which fell due exactly where this study is heading. An order with four rented interpreter classes and none of its own has no single authoritative account of itself to hand to the next generation. When the founder's grandsons were raised, each was raised near a different set of them — Confucians in one household, Persian Muslims in another, Nestorians and steppe traditionalists in a third — and when the succession came they did not merely want different things. They had been told different stories about what the order was.

Reading information and suppression against the framework

Four contributions.

First, the seam can run outward, and where a floor is priced by reputation, the information task is publication rather than concealment. The colonial pattern in this collection is a seam policed against the metropole's own eyes, with the whole apparatus devoted to keeping the funding public from seeing the floor. Invert the conditions — no metropolitan public, a frontier that must keep moving, and terror that functions as advertised price — and the seam inverts with them. The target audience becomes the **unconquered**; the required message is **larger than the truth**; and the enemy of the policy is not the crusading journalist but the sceptic who says the numbers cannot be right. **Diagnostic: where a ruler is found inflating his own casualty figures in his own correspondence with foreign powers, the terror is**

operating as capital and the numbers are an instrument rather than a record. Hülegü's letter to Louis IX is the specimen.

Second — the principal contribution — a conqueror can outsource his terror-publishing to his victims, and their own incentives will do it better than his could. The defeated chronicler requires the calamity to be unprecedented, because an ordinary defeat would indict his own order and a cosmic one indicts nobody. The collaborating chronicler requires it to be providential, because service under a conqueror is treason and service under a divine visitation is submission. Both inflate; neither is lying; and the conqueror pays nothing and need only refrain from correcting them. Taken with the finding that the same class also supplied the conqueror's legitimating doctrine unbidden, the corpus should hold a general proposition: **a conquered interpreter class in the conqueror's employment will generate, at its own expense, both the theology that explains the conquest and the atrocity literature that enforces it, because the same account discharges both of its own obligations — to explain the defeat to its congregation and its survival to itself.**

Third, an unpublished law is the purest form of the outflow valve, and it should be read as a technique rather than as an accident of survival. The *jasaq* was never promulgated, and the historiography treats this chiefly as a problem for scholars. It was a governing instrument: a standard nobody has seen cannot be quoted back at the man applying it, cannot generate a precedent, cannot be shown to have been breached, and can be altered without amendment. **Where a case reports a code that everyone refers to and no one can produce, ask who benefits from its unavailability**, and expect the answer to be whoever administers it.

Fourth, a refinement on the vacancy at the seam. The framework holds that a destroyed interpreter class is replaced, and often by a more captured occupant. This case shows a third outcome: **a conqueror who destroys his own interpreter class and then rents replacements from the populations he has conquered acquires a crowded seam he neither designed nor wanted.** The plurality is real and has real effects — four bodies of clergy at the same court, none able to silence the others, an emperor staging a doctrinal debate and appointing arbiters, a body of hostile literature written without penalty. But it is not toleration and should not be scored as a virtue; it is what happens when a ruler needs an interpreter, has killed his own, and can only lease. And the corpus should note where the bill falls. **An order with no interpreter class of its own has no single account of itself to transmit, and its heirs will be formed by whichever of the leased interpreters happened to hold them** — so the plurality that looks like breadth at the height of the order is, at the succession, simply

the fact that the claimants no longer speak the same language about what they are claiming.

A note on sources. Ibn al-Athir's statements of reluctance and of the scale of the calamity are quoted from the older standard English rendering, long in the public domain and widely reproduced from E. G. Browne's *A Literary History of Persia* (1902); the *al-Kamil fi'l-Ta'rikh* runs to 1231 and its author died in 1233. A reader wanting the modern scholarly text should go to D. S. Richards's translation of the relevant part of the *Kamil* (Ashgate, 2008). It is material to this module's reading that Ibn al-Athir was at Mosul, had not encountered the Mongols, relied on the accounts of refugees passing through Iraq, and appears to have written the section only when a Mongol garrison in Azerbaijan brought the threat close to home; the recent scholarship on early Mongol rule in the region makes this point and it is followed here.

Juvayni's descriptions of Nishapur (that neither cats nor dogs were spared and the site was sown with barley) and his figures for Nishapur and Merv, together with the thirteen-day count at Merv, are as reported in the standard literature and in J. A. Boyle's translation of the *Tarikh-i Jahan Gusha*. Casualty figures throughout are given as ranges attributed to named chroniclers and none is a count: Juvayni at 1,747,000 for Nishapur and 1,300,000 for Merv; Ibn al-Athir at 700,000 for Nishapur; Hamdallah Mustawfi, writing in 1330, at 800,000 for Baghdad; against modern estimates for Nishapur in the range of 100,000–200,000. Several of the medieval figures exceed any plausible population of the city concerned, which is itself the point at issue. The scholarly assessments cited are David Morgan's in *The Mongols* (that the figures are evidence of a state of mind rather than statistical information), Jack Weatherford's, and George Lane's judgement that the Mongols deliberately exaggerated and encouraged the horror stories that preceded them. Hülegü's claim in his letter to Louis IX is reported in the literature with variant figures and is given here with that variation noted; the argument in the text depends on the fact of a ruler reporting his own atrocity's scale to a foreign king, not on which figure is correct.

On the *yam*: the spacing of stations at roughly twenty to forty miles, calibrated to a pony's range; the supply of keepers, horses, provisions, mares and carts by the thousands of the districts under quotas fixed by Ögedei's decree; the *paiza* as the credential of requisition; Marco Polo's description of station stabling, arrival logs and the messengers' bindings; and the reported speeds of two hundred to two hundred and fifty miles a day for urgent traffic — all follow the standard literature and the eyewitness accounts of Carpini, Rubruck, Polo and Odoric, paraphrased, with the speeds registered as reports rather than measurements. Thomas Allsen's work is the place to go for the system's administration. Ögedei's prohibition on the nobility issuing

paizas and decrees, and Möngke's exclusion of merchant partners from the relay and his despatch of imperial investigators, are as recorded in the reference literature.

Ögedei's establishment of the relay with fixed quotas, and the penalty announced for pilfering from them, are in the *Secret History* (§279–280) as quoted in this study's treatment of extraction. The Teb-tenggeri episode — the gathering of the people of the nine tongues, the humiliation of the khan's brothers, the accusation about contradictory omens concerning Qasar, the killing by prearrangement with the spine broken, and the subsequent explanation that Heaven had carried him off because he was not loved by it — is at §244–246 in Urgunge Onon's translation and is used, as throughout, for what the imperial tradition held rather than as an independent record.

On the secrecy of the *jasaq*: no copy survives, it was never promulgated publicly, and the standard modern assessment holds the secrecy to have been functional in permitting selective modification and application. David Ayalon's demonstration that Juvayni is very nearly the sole contemporary source for its contents stands behind everything this study says about the code. The reading of an unpublished law as an instrument of rule rather than an accident of transmission is this study's own.

The absence of censorship, heresy proceedings and licensing of preachers among the conquered populations is an argument from silence and is presented as such; the silence is consistent across the Persian, Arabic, Chinese and Rus' records, and no positive claim is made beyond that.

MODULE 8

A Falconer Found the Camp

Module 8 · Elite Coordination and the Default — an arrangement in which every man's own interest defended the whole, audited link by link; why the officer corps never fractured and the family always did; and how a procedure designed to choose a ruler turned every prince's inheritance into the prize of a contest he could not afford to lose

What is being audited

Durable hierarchies are not held together by loyalty, agreement or affection, and the men inside them frequently detest one another. They are held together because of how the positions are arranged. Where the arrangement is well made, each man defending his own place is thereby defending the whole structure, without intending to, without conspiring with anyone, and without needing to approve of the man above him. Nobody has to be persuaded. The arrangement reproduces itself as a by-product of ordinary self-interest, and this is what makes it cheap and what makes it last.

The audit is therefore mechanical. Go down the chain — from the man on the throne through the princes, the commanders, the guardsmen, the sons-in-law, the clerks, the client rulers — and ask of each: *if this arrangement collapsed tomorrow, would this man be better or worse off?* Where the answer is *worse*, the link holds itself. Where the answer is *better*, or even *no different*, the link is where the fracture will come from.

And the fracture, when it comes, is almost never from below. It comes from a group inside the arrangement that has standing and means and has stopped benefiting.

This module runs that audit on the Mongol elite across three phases: while the founder lived, from his death to 1241, and from 1241 to the killing of the arrangement in 1251. The seed for this study asked why the empire held for fourteen years after Chinggis died and then did not, and suspected the delay and the fragility had the same cause. They do not. They have two different causes, applied to two different classes of men, and that is the finding.

The chain while the founder lived

The ordinary trooper. He held a place in a numbered unit, an allocated pasture that came with it, a share of plunder distributed by rule rather than by a lord's favour, a

family entitled to his share if he died, and — if he was any good — a route upward that had visibly carried a blacksmith's son and a pardoned enemy archer to the command of thousands. He could not leave his unit on pain of death, and there was nowhere to go if he could. Collapse the arrangement and he loses everything and gains nothing. **Holds.**

The commander of a thousand. Appointed, not acclaimed. He commanded households he had no hereditary claim on, in a unit assembled deliberately across the old tribal lines so that it was nobody's kin group. His standing came entirely from the man who appointed him, his income came from campaigns, and his son was in the khan's guard. He had, by construction, no independent base to fall back on. Collapse the arrangement and he is a man with no people. **Holds, and holds harder than any comparable position in the corpus.**

The guardsman. Son or brother of a commander, taken into the khan's household at the age when the world is still being furnished, outranking a chiliarch in the field, exceptionally well paid, and the pool from which the next generation of commanders was drawn. His father's compliance was secured by his presence and his own prospects were secured by the khan's survival. **Holds.**

The imperial son-in-law. The Onggirat, the Ikires, the Önggüt, the Oirat, the Uighur ruling house: peoples permitted to remain intact, under their own lords, when every other people on the steppe had been broken up — and permitted on one condition, a marriage with the golden lineage renewed every generation. Their corporate existence was the arrangement's gift and could be withdrawn. **Holds.**

The client ruler. A Rus' prince required to travel to Sarai, do homage and obtain a written patent before succeeding; a Uighur *idiqut* confirmed in place; a Korean king. Each held his throne against his own rivals because the khan said so. **Holds — and note that the arrangement made him the enemy of his own nobility rather than of the Mongols.**

The prince of the blood. He held a share of households, growing with every conquest, and troops drawn from it that he personally commanded. While the founder lived, that share was revocable — Qasar's was cut from four thousand to fourteen hundred in secret, and everyone knew it. **Holds, and holds because the grantor was still alive.**

The administrator. Yelü Chucai, Mahmud Yalavach, Korguz, the ortoq financiers. Here the answer is different and the framework has met it before: every one of them held portable competence and no stake. A Khitan Confucian, a Khwarazmian Muslim, an Uighur governor — each could be dismissed without losing anything but a post, and each could have served somebody else. **Does not hold.** But note precisely why it did not matter yet: none of these men commanded troops. A link that cannot fracture

the arrangement, only be discarded by it, is a weakness in the administration and not in the constitution.

So the chain in 1227 is as tight as anything in this collection. And it is worth naming the reason, because it is not a moral one. **Almost every position in the arrangement had been created by the arrangement**, out of nothing, within living memory, for men who had held no comparable position before. There was no prior aristocracy left with an independent claim, because the founding had spent thirteen years destroying it.

Why the machine held to 1241

Three things kept it running after the founder's death, and only one of them is usually noticed.

First, the frontier was moving and paying. The Jin were destroyed in 1234; Iran, the Rus' principalities and the Hungarian plain followed. Conquest is the outlet through which an order discharges the pressure of more elite claimants than it has chairs for, and the Chinggisid line was breeding fast. Every campaign created new commands, new shares, new territories for new princes. While that ran, the surplus of claimants had somewhere to go that was not each other.

Second, and much less noticed, the princes' holdings were interlocked. The *ulus* system did not give each branch a clean bloc. Princes of one line held troops, pasture, revenue rights and dependent populations **inside the territories administered by other lines**: Jochid forces and revenues in Iran, Chagatayid contingents there too, Berke's dependants in Bukhara, and reciprocal holdings in the east. Ögedei's fiscal centralisation worked in the same direction, funnelling revenue through quotas rather than letting each ulus tax on its own account.

That is the real machinery of the default in this case, and it should be stated as an engineering fact. **A prince who wrecked the empire wrecked his own assets inside somebody else's share of it.** Every branch was a hostage in every other branch's territory. Nobody had to trust anybody; the map did the work.

Third, the assembly still met and the results still bound. Ögedei's election in 1229 went through. His own great fiscal decree of 1235 was submitted to his elder brother Chaghatai for approval before enactment, and Chaghatai's assent was recorded, and Chaghatai offered to extend the relay line to meet his own and to get Batu to join his to it. Three men who commanded separate armies coordinating a piece of infrastructure by correspondence, each conceding the others' standing: that is a working default, and it is visible in the paperwork.

The silent change nobody legislated

Underneath all three, one thing altered without a decision and without a document.

While Chinggis lived, a prince's share was held at pleasure. After he died it was not, and it could not be, because a successor cannot revoke what he did not grant without denying the authority he inherits from. Ögedei's own throne was one of his father's dispositions. To treat those dispositions as revisable would have been to argue that his own was too.

So the shares hardened, silently, at the moment of the first succession — and they went on hardening at each subsequent one. The evidence is stark: Temüge Otchigin, the founder's youngest brother and the recipient of the largest single allotment of 1206, was tried and executed for attempting the throne during the interregnum — and his descendants kept his share and were still ruling on it into the twentieth century.

Set that beside the audit. A prince's position had been *created* by the arrangement and was therefore defended by it. Once his position became indefeasible property that survived his own execution for treason, the connection was cut. He now held his share whatever happened to the empire. **The link had not been broken by anybody; it had simply stopped being load-bearing, and nobody noticed because nothing had changed on the surface.**

1241: the frontier loses to the funeral

Ögedei died in December 1241. Batu's armies were in Hungary and had beaten everything sent against them. They went home.

The usual reading of that withdrawal is that the succession *interrupted* the conquest. Read it through the audit and it is the opposite: the withdrawal is the default working exactly as designed. Every prince's position depended on being present when the succession was decided, so every prince came. The arrangement's own coordinating procedure outbid its own frontier, and the frontier was abandoned by men who were each defending their own place correctly.

In a conquest state whose succession requires a physical assembly of everyone who matters, the succession and the frontier are in direct competition, and the succession wins every time. That is a structural cost and it recurs: the campaigns stop, the armies turn round, and the enemy is granted years. It is the price of an elective apex in an empire that spans continents, and it is paid in full at every transition.

1242–1246: a regent with nothing of her own to defend

Töregene held the empire for close to five years while the succession was fought over, and her conduct is the sharpest illustration in the case of what happens when someone occupies the chair whose interest is not the arrangement's continuation.

She had no position of her own that the empire's survival protected. What she had was a candidate — her son Güyük — against the rival claim of Ögedei's designated grandson Shiremün and the hostility of Batu, the senior surviving prince, who thought he had the better claim as the descendant of the eldest son.

So she spent the state on the election. She dismissed her husband's ministers: Yelü Chucai lost his influence and died soon after; Mahmud Yalavach fled to the protection of other princes — a detail worth pausing on, since it shows that an administrator's only refuge was a rival prince, which is precisely the position of a man with portable competence and no stake. She installed her own people, most prominently a Persian captive named Fatima and the tax farmer Abd al-Rahman. And she issued to Abd al-Rahman blank forms bearing the imperial seal, so that he could write decrees at his own discretion.

That last act is the default's condition made visible. **The arrangement's own authority was being sold in blank to buy the outcome of an internal contest.** Nobody in the chain was defending the whole any more, because the person at the top of the chain was defending one branch of the family against another and had no reason to preserve anything she might not inherit.

Güyük was elected in August 1246 — without Batu, who stayed away. The senior prince of the eldest line declined to attend the assembly that made the great khan. That is the first open breach of the coordinating procedure, and it was not repaired.

Güyük then spent his short reign undoing his mother's: Fatima was tortured and drowned, and dozens of Töregene's appointees were purged. **Two khans running, each opening with the destruction of his predecessor's administration.** An arrangement in which the officials of the last reign are the enemies of the next cannot accumulate an administrative class — which is exactly why this empire kept hiring competent foreigners and kept losing them, and why the fiscal machinery had to be rebuilt from scratch by each regime.

In late 1247 Güyük marched west with a large force. The official purpose was expansion. Contemporaries alleged the target was Batu. He died on the road in April 1248 at the age of forty-two.

Whatever the truth of the allegation, the fact that it was credible to contemporaries is the finding. By 1248 the Great Khan and the senior prince of the empire were each raising armies with the other in mind, and everybody assumed it.

1250–1251: the coup, and the falconer

After Güyük's death his widow Oghul Qaimish held a nominal regency for nearly three years while nothing was agreed.

Then Batu, who commanded the largest army in the empire and would not take the throne himself, convened an assembly in his own territory — at Ala Qamaq, far from the Mongol homeland — and had Möngke, eldest son of Tolui, proclaimed. Attendance was limited and the location was wrong by every precedent; the Ögedeid scribe Bala objected on exactly those grounds and was overruled. A second assembly was convened in Mongolia on 1 July 1251, organised by Möngke's mother Sorghaghtani and Batu's brother Berke, and this one proclaimed him properly.

The throne had passed from the line of Ögedei to the line of Tolui, and it had passed because two branches with armies had agreed to move it.

Shortly afterwards Shiremün — Ögedei's favourite grandson, the man Ögedei had designated — and Güyük's son Naqu approached the khan's camp, professing to come and do homage.

And here the arrangement's survival turns on an accident. **A falconer, out with his bird, came upon their concealed encampment and reported it.** The attempt was pre-empted, the men taken, and an investigation opened.

Pause on that, because it is the single most diagnostic fact in the module. In a functioning default nothing depends on luck, because every position in the chain is being defended by the man who holds it and the structure is redundant. By 1251 the continuation of the Mongol arrangement depended on whether a man with a hawk happened to ride over the right hill. That is what a default looks like after it has stopped running: not a dramatic collapse, but a structure whose survival has quietly become contingent on things nobody arranged.

The purge, and what it destroyed

The investigation became a series of trials across the whole empire. The dead among the aristocracy, officials and commanders are estimated at between seventy-seven and three hundred; the named include Eljigidei, Yesü Möngke, Büri and Shiremün. Most princes of Chinggisid blood who were implicated were exiled rather than killed, the taboo on shedding the blood of the golden lineage holding to that extent. The Uighur *idiqut* Salindi, who had married a daughter of Chinggis and backed the Ögedeids, was publicly executed — a son-in-law, not of the blood, and so not covered by the taboo. And the estates of the Ögedeid and Chagatayid houses were **eliminated**, with acquiescent survivors reassigned lands in Turkestan or the north-west.

That last measure is the one that matters, and the framework's audit shows why.

For twenty-four years the princely share had been indefeasible. A share held whatever happened — Temüge Otchigin's had survived his execution. Möngke's purge established, publicly and at scale, that this was no longer true: a *qubi* could be confiscated after all, provided the confiscator had won a war for it.

Consider what that does to every remaining prince's ledger. Before 1251 his holding was safe regardless of who sat on the throne, which meant he could afford to lose a succession. After 1251 his holding was safe only if his line held the throne or was allied with the line that did, which meant he could not.

Möngke's purge converted the succession from a contest about who would lead into a contest about who would keep what he already had. And a contest of that kind cannot be conceded, because the loser is not demoted but dispossessed. Every subsequent transition therefore had to be fought, and the losing party had to fight to the end, because there was no longer a survivable defeat.

The interlocking enclaves went the same way and for the same reason. Once one branch had shown that another branch's assets could be seized, every enclave a prince held inside a rival's territory stopped being a bond and became a hostage — and within a few years the seizures duly began: Jochid forces and pasturelands in Iran absorbed, a Chagatayid contingent swallowed, Berke's dependants in Bukhara massacred. The machinery that had made wrecking the empire unprofitable was itself dismantled, by men each defending his own position perfectly.

The audit's result: the officer corps never fractured

Now the finding the seed did not expect, and it comes from noticing what is *absent* from the whole record above.

Read the list of men who fought over the Mongol throne between 1227 and 1260 and every one of them is a Chinggisid, a Chinggisid's widow, or a Chinggisid's designated candidate. Not one commander of a thousand made a bid. Not one commander of ten thousand. No general seized a province; no guard commander installed a puppet; no *tamma* army in Iran or north China declared for itself. Sübe'edei, the most successful field commander of the age, died in retirement on the Tuul. Muqali governed north China as viceroy for years and handed it on to his son in the khan's name.

That is extraordinary, and against the corpus it is nearly unique. The problem this framework says has no reliable solution — that a centre needs capable men and capable men can replace it — was, at the level of the *officer corps*, **solved**, and stayed solved

through four contested successions, two long interregna and a purge of three hundred people.

The reason is the founding, and it is legible in the audit above. Commanders were appointed rather than acclaimed; they were placed over units deliberately composed so as not to be their kin; they were drawn heavily from men of low or servile origin and from pardoned enemies, so that they had no independent following anywhere; their sons were in the khan's household; and a guardsman outranked them. A man in that position who rebelled would have found himself commanding nobody, because the thousand he led had no reason on earth to follow him rather than the khan who had made him.

The Mongol order's answer to the problem of capable men worked completely. Its problem was never capable men. Its problem was *eligible* men.

Two answers, two classes, one failure

Classify the case against the menu and the structure comes out clean.

Toward the martial and administrative class, the founding ran **prevention by outsider recruitment** — recruiting the core from men with no local base, denying them a hereditary claim on the people they commanded, and taking their sons as guarantee. This is the family the Ottoman *devshirme* belongs to, and here it held for the whole period under examination and beyond.

Toward the founder's own kin, the founding ran **co-optation by blood** — a share of the empire's population, heritable, transmitted by descent, defended by contingents the holder commanded in person. And this framework's standing prediction for a co-optation that leaves its grantees armed is the medieval one: the ruler's army is the sum of his magnates' retinues and can at any moment become the army that removes him, so date the first revolt.

The dates are on the record. 1241: the frontier abandoned for a succession. 1246: the senior prince boycotts the assembly. 1248: the great khan marches west and everyone assumes he means to fight the senior prince. 1251: an assembly convened in the wrong place by the branch with the biggest army, a coup attempt, three hundred dead and two houses dispossessed.

So the delay and the fragility do not have the same cause. The delay is the prevention half working; the fragility is the co-optation half failing — and the co-optation half was the one the founder could not have applied differently, because the men in question were his sons, and no arrangement in which the ruling line is denied a share of the conquest would have survived his own funeral.

There is a further reason the family was the fracture point and the officers were not, and it turns on eligibility. The framework's standing pressure is elite overproduction: an order that forms more claimants than it has chairs manufactures a thwarted counter-elite. Here the overproduction ran only in one lineage, and it ran fast — a founder with four sons by his principal wife, and by 1251 dozens of grandsons and great-grandsons each entitled by birth to rule. Conquest was the outlet, and while it ran the surplus was exported: Hülegü was given a fifth of the army and sent to Iran; Qubilai was sent south. But the outlet was a frontier, and a frontier is finite. **A lineage breeds on a biological schedule and a frontier expands on a military one, and when the second falls behind the first the surplus turns inward.**

Reading the default against the framework

Five contributions.

First — the case's principal contribution — a succession procedure can itself dismantle the default. The audit shows an arrangement in which every position was defended by its holder's own interest, and shows it failing without anybody defecting, betraying or ceasing to calculate correctly. What broke it was the interaction of two features that were separately sound: an *indefeasible* princely share, and an *elective* apex. Indefeasibility meant a prince's holding no longer depended on the empire; election meant the throne could be moved by whichever coalition could assemble; and the moment one coalition used the throne to confiscate a rival's share — 1251 — the two features fused into a rule that no prince could afford to lose a succession. **A contest that cannot be conceded must be fought to the end, and an order that has made every transition unconcedable has abolished its own default at the top while leaving it perfectly intact everywhere else.**

Second, name the mechanism that actually held the princes together while it worked, because it is not loyalty and it is engineerable. The Mongol default ran on **cross-holding**: each branch possessed troops, pasture, revenue and dependants *inside* the territories administered by the others, so that wrecking the arrangement meant wrecking one's own assets in somebody else's hands. That is a designable feature and the corpus should look for it elsewhere. **Its diagnostic is that the enclaves are the first thing seized when the default fails** — the seizure of cross-holdings is not a symptom of fragmentation but its mechanism, because each seizure removes one more reason for a rival to want the whole to stand.

Third, a distinct structural cost of the elective apex in a conquest state: the succession and the frontier compete, and the succession always wins. Every transition pulled every prince who mattered back to the assembly, and the armies came

with them. Hungary in 1241 is the clearest instance and there are others. **An order that both elects its ruler and lives on expansion has built a periodic halt into its revenue**, and the halt arrives at exactly the moment — a disputed succession — when the revenue is most needed to buy agreement.

Fourth, on regents. The framework should hold that **a regent is the one occupant of an apex whose own position is not protected by the arrangement's survival**, and should expect regencies to be periods in which the order's assets are converted into the currency of the internal contest. Töregene sold offices, dismissed the competent, elevated the useful and issued the imperial seal in blank. She was not corrupt in any sense that would have been legible to her; she was doing precisely what her position rewarded, which is the definition of a broken link. **Where a case contains a regency, audit the regent first.**

Fifth, the corpus should record that this case solved the open problem at the level of the officer corps, and record how. Not one commander in fifty years attempted the throne. The instruments were appointment over acclamation, units composed against kinship, recruitment from men without an independent base, sons held in the ruling household, and a guard whose ordinary member outranked a field commander. **Where a founding creates every position in its own hierarchy from nothing, having first destroyed the aristocracy that preceded it, the martial class becomes structurally incapable of fracture — because a commander who rebels commands men who have no reason to follow him.** The price of that solution is that it cannot be applied to the founder's own line, and so the fracture, when it comes, comes from the only men in the arrangement whose claim did not originate with the arrangement: the ones who had it by birth.

A note on sources. The sequence of events in this module follows the standard modern literature on the succession crises: Ögedei's death in December 1241 and the withdrawal of Batu's armies from Hungary; Töregene's regency from 1242 to 1246, her dismissal of Yelü Chucai and Mahmud Yalavach, her elevation of Fatima and the tax farmer Abd al-Rahman, and her issue to him of blank forms bearing the imperial seal; the election of Güyük on 24 August 1246 in Batu's absence, and Güyük's purge of his mother's appointees including the torture and drowning of Fatima; Güyük's march west in late 1247 with a large force, the contemporary allegation that Batu was the target, and his death at Qum-Senggir on 20 April 1248; Oghul Qaimish's nominal regency; Batu's assembly at Ala Qamaq and Bala's objection to its validity; the second assembly organised by Sorghaghtani and Berke on 1 July 1251; the coup attempt by Shiremün and Naqu; its discovery by a falconer; the ensuing trials; and the execution of

the Uighur *idiqut* Salindi. Where sources disagree — as on whether Güyük's western march was aimed at Batu — the disagreement is reported rather than resolved.

Casualty figures for the purge of 1251 are given as the range the literature gives, seventy-seven to three hundred among aristocrats, officials and commanders, with Eljigidei, Yesü Möngke, Büri and Shiremün among the named; most implicated Chinggisid princes were exiled rather than executed. None of these figures is a count. The confiscation of the Ögedeid and Chagatayid estates and the reassignment of acquiescent survivors to Turkestan and the north-west follow the same literature.

On the interlocking holdings between uluses — troops of one branch stationed in another's territory, and the possession by khans and princes of one ulus of rights, property and personnel within another's — this module follows Peter Jackson's account of the period of inter-Mongol warfare, paraphrased and credited; the subsequent liquidation of those cross-holdings (Jochid forces and pasturelands in Iran absorbed by Hülegü, the Chaghadayid contingent under Tegüder swallowed, Berke's dependants massacred at Bukhara by Alughu) is from the same source and is noted here as the mechanism this module identifies, though the identification is this study's own. Readers should also go to Thomas Allsen's *Mongol Imperialism* for Möngke's reign and to Michal Biran's and Christopher Atwood's work on the ulus system.

Ögedei's fiscal decree of 1235, its submission to Chaghatai for approval, and Chaghatai's recorded assent and offer to extend the relay to Batu, are in the *Secret History* (§279–280) in Urgunge Onon's translation, as quoted in this study's treatment of extraction; the *Secret History* is used, as throughout, for what the imperial tradition held. The survival of Temüge Otchigin's appanage after his execution, and its descent to the Ongni'ud into the twentieth century, follow the recent scholarship on the Mongol appanage system.

The historiography of these successions is genuinely contested, and this module's structural reading does not depend on resolving it. A serious modern line of argument holds Ariq Böke rather than Qubilai to have been Möngke's intended successor and Qubilai's later accession a usurpation; another holds that the "four khanates" model overstates the fragmentation and that revenue-sharing, joint campaigns and the *tamma* system sustained real interconnection into the late thirteenth century — the Talas assembly of 1269 being cited in support. Both qualifications are registered. Neither disturbs the audit, whose subject is the incentive facing each position rather than the outcome of any particular dispute.

The reading of the falconer's discovery as diagnostic — that a default which has stopped running is one whose survival has become contingent — is this study's own,

and is offered as an image for a structural claim rather than as a claim about the importance of the falconer.

MODULE 9

Six Patents in a Church Archive

Module 9 · Plurality or Foreclosure — an order in which a blacksmith's son could command ten thousand men and no man alive held a right against the throne; where the law existed, was written down, was protected from alteration by decree, and could not be cited by anybody, because nobody had been allowed to read it

The question, and the confusion it has to clear first

The question is whether there was any liberty here, or only the appearance of it. Was there protection from the apparatus? Could a person speak, petition, assemble, hold property the state could not take, appeal a decision, or refuse a demand and survive? And where such protections exist anywhere, they were not created by the people at the bottom, who have no bargaining position. They come out of fights *inside* the hierarchy — a faction with standing and means, bargaining at a moment when neither it nor the apex wants to wreck the arrangement, extracting a concession as the price of settlement. Those concessions leave residue. The residue accretes across generations, and after long enough the accumulated residue is what a later age calls its rights.

Before that question can be asked of the Mongol empire, one confusion has to be cleared away, because this case makes it more tempting than any other in the collection.

Mobility is not liberty, and this order had a great deal of the first and almost none of the second.

A Tatar foundling picked up as a small child became supreme judge of the empire and was called a sixth brother. An enemy archer who had shot the khan's horse in the neck confessed it to his face, was pardoned, renamed and given a command. A blacksmith's son from a forest people commanded armies from Hungary to the Yellow River. Guardsmen were taken on merit regardless of birth, outranked commanders of a thousand, and were promoted out to command. Whole peoples were spared dissolution because their lord had married the right woman. By any measure of openness to talent this is one of the most permeable elites in the medieval world.

And not one of those men held a single protection against the person who had raised him. Shigi-qutuqu's immunity from punishment for nine crimes was a favour, granted by the khan, and there was no court on earth that could have made a khan honour it. Qasar, a full brother of the founder, had two-thirds of his people taken away in secret on a shaman's word, with no charge, no hearing and no appeal. Mahmud

Yalavach, the ablest administrator in the empire, had to flee to the protection of a rival prince when the regent turned against him.

A promotion runs from the apex; a liberty runs against it. The Mongol order distributed the first lavishly and the second almost not at all, and the corpus should hold these apart as separate variables, because an order can score very high on one and near zero on the other, and this is the cleanest instance available.

Running the standard tests

Could you speak? Apparently yes. Ibn al-Athir wrote at Mosul that the Mongols were worse than the Antichrist and spared none, slaying women and children, and died in his bed. Persian poets produced a large literature of lamentation. There was no index of banned books, no heresy tribunal, no censor, no licensing of preachers.

But this is not a liberty and must not be scored as one. There was no rule protecting it, no remedy if it had been violated, and no case in which anybody successfully invoked anything. The speech was safe because the order did not need the conquered's belief, had made no attempt to form them, and was therefore indifferent to what they wrote. **An uninteresting fact is safer than a censored one, and freedom that depends on the ruler's indifference evaporates the moment he becomes interested.** It is the absence of a threat, not the presence of a shield.

Could you petition? Yes, and extensively — but to a person, not to an office under a rule. Rus' princes travelled to Sarai to plead their cases and to obtain the patents that confirmed them. Clerics approached the khan for exemptions. Subject rulers appealed against each other. This is access, and access is worth having; it is not a right, because the man being petitioned was under no obligation to hear, and a rival's better gift outranked a better case.

Could you assemble? The *quriltai*, and only for princes, commanders and the imperial sons-in-law. Nothing whatever for anyone else, at any level, in any province. No guild had a charter, no town had a commune, no province had an estate.

Was there law? This is where the case gets interesting, because the answer is emphatically yes, and it produced nothing.

Courts without a citable rule

The founding built a judiciary. Shigi-qutuqu was made supreme judge with authority over life and death; there were *yarghuchi*, judges, holding *yarghu* tribunals across the empire; and there was a register. The khan's decree on that register is worth setting beside the question of liberty:

> *"Write down in a blue book a list of the shares into which [you] divide the nation and of the judgments [you] deliver. Unto the seed of [my] seed, let no one alter the blue writing of Shigi-qutuqu, ordained in consultation with me, [written] on white paper in a blue book and made into a register. Anyone who alters it shall be [found] guilty."*

A record of judgments, declared unalterable in perpetuity, with a penalty for tampering. That is the raw material of precedent, and in another order it would be the beginning of something.

It produced nothing, and the reason is single and structural. **The law was never published.** The *jasaq* was not promulgated; no copy existed that a subject could consult; the modern assessment is that the secrecy was functional, precisely because rules that are not public can be modified and applied selectively. The blue register was kept in the khan's household by the khan's judge.

Take that seriously and the whole liberty question in this empire resolves. **A liberty is, operationally, the capacity to cite a rule against the man who is applying it to you.** That is what makes it more than words: not the elegance of the clause but the fact that the subject can produce it, in front of witnesses, and put the official to the trouble of denying it. Where the rule is secret, that move is unavailable. You cannot quote what you have not been shown. You cannot demonstrate a breach of a standard nobody will state. You cannot generate a precedent, because the precedents are in a book in a tent you will never enter.

So the empire had judges, tribunals, a written record and a decree protecting it — the entire apparatus of law — without the function of law. What it had was **administration conducted in a judicial idiom**. And this is a general proposition the corpus should carry: **promulgation is the threshold condition for liberty, and a judicial apparatus operating on an unpublished rule is not a weak legal system but a different kind of thing altogether.**

The one instrument that worked: the patent

And yet something did exist that a subject could produce and wave in an official's face. It was not a law. It was a **document with his own name on it.**

In an order with no public rule, the only enforceable right is a private patent — a written, sealed, personal grant of immunity, held by the beneficiary, produced on demand. The Mongol word is *jarliq*, and its history is the whole of this module's positive content.

It begins at the founding with *darkhan* status, granted in 1206 to men who had assisted the rise: exemption from taxation, from requisition and from labour service; the right to enter the khan's tent unannounced; immunity from punishment for a stated number of offences, usually given as nine; and — the crucial feature — heritable.

It extends to clergy, beginning with named individuals. The monk Haiyun and his master received tax exemption in 1219 on Muqali's recommendation. The Daoist Qiu Chuji received authority over the Daoists of China and exemption from tax and labour by decree in March 1223, directed at him and his disciples personally. Only later did the grants widen from named men to whole clerical castes, always on the same stated consideration: prayers for the khan and his family.

It extends to merchants. Ortoq traders held *jarliqs* granting exemption from tax on goods carried, access to the relay stations, and protection from local interference, with a *paiza* as the physical badge of it.

And in Rus' it produced the only body of these documents that survives, which is why this module is named for it.

Six patents in a church archive

In the archive of the Rus' metropolitans there are preserved six *yarliki* — the so-called Short Collection — taken to be Russian translations of authentic patents issued by the khans of the Qipchaq khanate. They include a grant from Mengü-Temür to Metropolitan Peter, grants from the khatun Taydula, and one from Khan Tiuliak to Metropolitan Mikhail in 1379. A seventh, purporting to come from Özbeg to Metropolitan Peter, has been shown to be a sixteenth-century forgery — which is itself informative, since people forge the kind of document that works.

What the genuine ones say is consistent. They affirm the freedom of the Church from taxes and tributes; they declare that Church property is to be protected from expropriation or damage; and they state the consideration — that the churchmen pray for the well-being of the khan and his family. The formula in the Russian renderings enumerates what will not be taken: no tribute, no tax per plough, no duty, no horses, no recruits, no food supplies. And in at least some of them the immunity extends further, to jurisdiction: the Metropolitan is to investigate and judge cases among his own people — robbery, theft and the rest — himself.

Now assess that as a liberty, strictly.

It is **written**, which the *jasaq* was not. It is **held by the beneficiary**, in his own archive, in his own language, and can be produced. It is **specific**, enumerating the exactions it bars, so that a *baskak* at the monastery gate can be shown the item he is violating. It carries a **stated consideration**, which makes it a bargain rather than a

favour. It confers **jurisdiction**, which is the strongest form of immunity available — not merely exemption from a tax but exclusion of the ruler's court. And it was **enforced**: the Rus' Church came through the Horde period not merely intact but as the wealthiest and most autonomous institution in the country, its monasteries accumulating an enormous share of the agricultural land, at a time when everything else in Rus' was being ground down.

That is a real liberty. It is the only kind this order produced.

And note its two limits, both of which are the framework's business. **It was granted to an institution, not to persons**, so no individual held anything under it except through his membership. And **it had to be reconfirmed at each accession** — which is why there are six of them and not one. A privilege that must be re-granted by every new ruler is held at pleasure however ancient it becomes; the reconfirmation is the tell. Each new khan's signature was simultaneously the renewal of the right and the demonstration that it was his to withhold.

Was there a factional fight behind any of it?

Test the proposition honestly, because it does not come out uniformly.

The clerical exemptions are mostly a purchase, not a bargain. The khan wanted intercession and bought it. There was no faction with standing threatening anything; there was a ruler with uncontested force paying for a service. What converted the purchase into something more was *repetition*: after four or five reconfirmations the holders came to expect it, to demand it at each accession, and to treat withholding as a breach. That is accretion without a fight, and it is slower and weaker than the bargained kind — which shows in what happened when a khan needed money, since Qubilai made the clergy of east Asia pay commercial and land taxes and a fourteenth-century khan of the Horde briefly taxed the Orthodox Church. A privilege built by repetition rather than by leverage collapses when the ruler's need changes.

The Rus' Church's position is closer to a genuine bargain, and the reason is structural. The khans held Rus' with almost no apparatus, through princes who collected on their behalf. The Church was the one institution that spanned every principality, survived every prince, and could deliver quiet — or withhold it. It bargained from a position that was real, and it got the strongest patent in the record, including jurisdiction. Its leverage was not force. It was indispensability to a cheap arrangement.

The merchants produced the clearest documented factional win. An imperial decree of July 1233 under Ögedei addressed disruptions to merchants' access to the relay stations, and reaffirmed their right to use the network **despite complaints from**

officials about overuse. There it is in one sentence: two parties inside the hierarchy — the administration, which was paying for the relay and wanted it protected, and the merchant partners, in whose ventures the khan and the princes had their own capital — and the khan ruling for the merchants because he was invested in them. A faction with standing and means got a written concession against another faction, and the concession stood. Ögedei had already had to forbid the nobility from issuing *paizas* at all, which tells you how contested the credential was.

And the aristocracy's own liberty was the assembly, which is the case's largest and shortest-lived.

The quriltai, and how a constraint dies

The *quriltai* was a genuine constraint on the apex, and the evidence for that is not rhetorical.

Chinggis had nominated Ögedei, and the assembly of 1229 still had to elect him, and took forty days of contested debate over rival claims — Tolui's, on the strength of holding the homeland, and the claims of Jochi's line through Batu. Ögedei's great fiscal decree of 1235 was submitted to his elder brother Chaghatai for approval before enactment, and Chaghatai's assent was recorded. The assembly was expected to meet in the ancestral valley between the Onon and the Kerulen. It required the presence of the *aqa* and the *ini*, the senior and junior princes, and the commanders. A khan not so elected was not properly khan, and everybody behaved as though this mattered.

The seed for this study guessed that the assembly was a real constraint destroyed by being *won*. The evidence supports that, and it is worth stating the mechanism precisely, because it applies well beyond this case.

In 1250 Batu, who commanded the largest army in the empire, convened an assembly at Ala Qamaq — in his own territory, far from the homeland, with limited attendance — and had Möngke proclaimed. The Ögedeid scribe Bala objected on exactly the right ground: that this was not a valid assembly. He was overruled. A second assembly was then convened in Mongolia, in the proper place, on 1 July 1251, to cure the defect.

Notice both halves. **The form still mattered enough that a second assembly had to be held.** And the cure was cosmetic, and everyone present knew it: the outcome had been settled by the branch with the largest army, and the second meeting ratified what the first had decided.

That is how a procedural constraint dies. Not by being defied — defiance leaves the rule intact and the defier in the wrong. It dies by being **satisfied, visibly, by a party that has packed it** — because after that, satisfying the rule proves nothing, and a proof

that proves nothing is not a constraint. Within nine years the question of who could convene a valid assembly had no answer at all, and in 1260 two of them elected two great khans in the same summer.

A constraint is killed by a compliance nobody believes, not by a breach everybody condemns.

Who was let in, and who never was

The framework asks who from below was admitted, and expects to find a factional fight behind any admission.

Admitted: men of no birth into the officer corps and the guard, on service. Whole peoples into the second circle of the settlement, by marriage. Clergy of four religions into fiscal immunity, by purchase. Merchants into privilege, by capital and by the princes' own investment. Captured administrators into the highest offices, by competence.

Never admitted, in any form, at any point: **the ordinary conquered subject.** There is no route in the record by which a Persian villager, a Chinese peasant or a Rus' ploughman could acquire a protection of any kind. He was not a member of an institution that held a patent unless he was a cleric. He could not petition except through a lord. He had no court he could reach, no rule he could cite, no assembly, no charter, no commune, no guild recognised by the order.

The *jarliq* system distributed liberties to institutions and to men who held something the khan continued to need. **It had no lower rung, because it was not a ladder — it was a set of individual bargains, and a peasant has nothing to bargain with.** This is the precise reason liberties in this order never generalised: a right that arrives as a personal patent extends to exactly the persons named in it, and the mechanism that produced it contains no principle that could be extended to anyone else.

The residue, and what became of it

Something did accrete, and it outlasted the empire by centuries. But look carefully at what accreted.

The Rus' Church emerged from Mongol rule as the richest and most independent institution in the country, holding jurisdiction over its own people and a very large share of the agricultural land, and its immunity long outlived the Horde. The *tarkhan* patent survived as a form into the Timurid, Ottoman, Safavid and Qing worlds. The

sealed grant of privilege, produced on demand and reconfirmed at each accession, became a standard instrument across half of Eurasia.

But what accreted was **the technique for granting exemptions, not a body of claims.** The residue is the charter, not the right. Nobody inherited a principle that persons are entitled to anything; what they inherited was a form of document by which a ruler could place a named party outside the reach of his own officials, and could stop doing so.

That is the difference between residue that becomes liberty and residue that becomes patronage, and it is worth naming the discriminator: **does the concession, once granted, contain a reason that would apply to somebody else?** A charter of towns implies other towns. A rule that the king may not tax without consent implies every taxpayer. A patent that Metropolitan Peter's church pays no plough tax implies nothing about anybody, and four hundred years of such patents implies nothing about anybody four hundred times over.

Reading plurality against the framework

Five contributions.

First, separate mobility from liberty and treat them as independent variables. This order had one of the most permeable elites in the medieval world — foundlings, blacksmiths' sons and pardoned enemies at the top of the army and the judiciary — and produced almost no protection for anybody against anybody. The test is simple and should be applied in every case: **does the protection run *from* the apex or *against* it?** A promotion, a favour, an exemption granted at pleasure and an immunity revocable in secret all run from it. Only what the holder can invoke against the granter runs against it. An order can max the first and zero the second, and readers who see the mobility and infer the liberty will get the case exactly backwards.

Second — the module's principal contribution — promulgation is the threshold condition, and an unpublished law forecloses liberty structurally however elaborate the judicial apparatus. The Mongols had a supreme judge, tribunals across the empire, a written register of judgments and a founding decree forbidding its alteration in perpetuity. None of it produced a right, because a subject cannot cite a rule he has not been shown, cannot demonstrate a breach of an unstated standard, and cannot build a precedent out of a book he cannot open. **Where a case reports courts, judges and records but no published code, expect administration in a judicial idiom and no liberties at all** — and note that the secrecy is usually not an accident of transmission but the point, since an unpublished rule can be modified without amendment and applied selectively without inconsistency.

Third, where there is no public law, liberties take the form of private patents, and the whole liberty question reduces to who can obtain one. The *jarliq* is the working instrument: written, specific, enumerating the exactions barred, held by the beneficiary, produced on demand, carrying a stated consideration. It is a real protection and the Rus' Church's rise proves it. **But two features mark it as a right that is not yet a right: it is granted to institutions rather than persons, and it must be reconfirmed at each accession.** The reconfirmation is the tell, and the corpus should treat it as diagnostic — **a privilege re-granted by every new ruler is held at pleasure however old it is**, and the renewal ceremony is simultaneously the honouring of the right and the demonstration that it remains the ruler's to withhold.

Fourth, on how a procedural constraint dies. The *quriltai* was a genuine limit — forty days of contested debate to elect a nominated heir, a required location, required attendance, and an elder brother's assent recorded on a tax decree. It was not destroyed by defiance. It was destroyed by **compliance that nobody believed**: an assembly convened in the wrong place by the branch with the biggest army, an objection on procedural grounds overruled, and then a second, correctly located assembly held to cure the defect, which ratified what had already been settled. After that, satisfying the requirement proved nothing, and a test that cannot fail is not a test. **A constraint dies of a hollow compliance, not of an honest breach** — and the diagnostic is the moment when the form is scrupulously observed by a party everyone can see has already won.

Fifth, the concession, and it is substantial. Something in this order genuinely was crowded rather than captured, though nobody designed it and nobody valued it. Because the Mongols destroyed their own interpreter class and then had to lease four foreign priesthoods, no single account of the world held the field at court. An emperor convened a formal doctrinal debate between Christians, Muslims and Buddhists with appointed arbiters and rules against insult and shouting. Clergy of four faiths drew stipends at the same court and none could silence the others. A chronicler in a Mongol-ruled city wrote that they were worse than the Antichrist and was not touched. Measured against most orders in this collection that is a wider space to stand in, and people lived better for it.

But it should be scored precisely for what it was. **It was not toleration and it was not a right. It was the by-product of a conqueror who needed interpreters, had killed his own, and could only rent — and the rented plurality lasted exactly as long as the poverty that produced it.** Within two generations each branch of the family had settled among one of the leased priesthoods and adopted its faith, and the crowded seam closed in four separate places at once.

A note on sources. The blue-book decree is quoted from Urgunge Onon's translation of the *Secret History of the Mongols* (§203), briefly and credited, as in this study's treatment of the settlement; the appointment of Shigi-qutuqu as supreme judge and his immunity from punishment for nine crimes are in the same passage. The *yarghuchi* judges and *yarghu* tribunals are standard in the literature.

On the secrecy of the *jasaq*: no copy survives, it was never publicly promulgated, and the standard modern assessment holds the secrecy to have been functional in permitting selective modification. David Ayalon's demonstration that Juvayni is very nearly the sole contemporary source for its contents underlies everything this study says about it. The argument that promulgation is the threshold condition for liberty is this study's own and is offered to be argued with.

On *darkhan* status — exemption from taxation, requisition and labour service, right of unannounced entry, heritable immunity from a stated number of offences usually given as nine, granted in 1206 to those who assisted the rise — the account follows the standard reference literature. The grants to the monk Haiyun in 1219 on Muqali's recommendation and to Qiu Chuji by decree of March 1223, their initially personal rather than institutional scope, and their consideration in prayers for the khan and his family, follow the recent scholarship on Mongol religious policy and tax exemption, paraphrased. The later withdrawal of exemptions by Qubilai in east Asia and by Janibeg of the Golden Horde is from the same literature.

On the *yarliki*: the Short Collection of six patents preserved in the Rus' metropolitan archive, taken as Russian translations of authentic Qipchaq khanate documents — including Mengü-Temür's to Metropolitan Peter, two from the khatun Taydula, and Khan Tiuliak's to Metropolitan Mikhail of 1379 — and the determination that a seventh, purporting to be Özbeg's to Metropolitan Peter, is a sixteenth-century forgery, follow the *Encyclopedia of Russian History* article on the *yarlyk*. The substance as summarised there is freedom of the Church from taxes and tributes, protection of Church property from expropriation or damage, and the consideration of prayers for the khan and his family. The fuller enumerated formula ("nor any tax per plough, nor any duty, nor horses, nor recruits, nor food supplies") and the grant of jurisdiction to the Metropolitan over robbery, theft and other cases among his own people are reported here as they appear in the Russian renderings in circulation; those renderings are translations of translations and the wording should be checked against the scholarly editions before being relied on. None of the pre-1260 Rus' princely *yarliki* survives at all, which is itself worth registering: every patent authorising a Rus' prince to rule from the mid-thirteenth to the mid-fifteenth century is lost, and only the Church kept its papers.

The imperial decree of July 1233 addressing disruption to merchants' access to the relay stations, and reaffirming their right to use it against officials' complaints of overuse, is as reported in the reference literature on *jarligs*; Ögedei's prohibition on the nobility issuing *paizas* and decrees is likewise. Ortoq privileges — tax exemption on goods, access to the *yam*, protection from local interference — follow the recent scholarship on Mongol–ortoq partnerships.

On the *quriltai*: the forty days of debate at the assembly of 1229 that elected Ögedei despite his father's nomination, and the rival claims of Tolui and of Jochi's line; the customary location in the Onon–Kerulen valley; the requirement of the *aqa* and *ini*; Batu's attendance in 1229 and absence thereafter; the assembly at Ala Qamaq in 1250 with limited attendance, Bala's objection to its validity and its being overruled; and the second, correctly located assembly of 1 July 1251 — all follow the standard literature, including the recent work on the transmission of authority through the *quriltais* and on the objects of loyalty in the early empire. Note that the historiography is contested: one serious line holds that the assembly was already largely ceremonial by Chinggis's own time, another that it remained a working constraint into the 1250s. This module takes the second position and states its evidence; a reader who takes the first will still find the mechanism in the closing section usable, since it concerns how a constraint dies rather than how strong it was.

Ibn al-Athir's statement that the Mongols spared none is quoted in this study's treatment of information from the older public-domain English rendering. Möngke's staged debate with appointed arbiters and rules against insult is from William of Rubruck in W. W. Rockhill's translation (Hakluyt Society, 1900), also public domain.

The distinction between mobility and liberty, the promulgation threshold, the reconfirmation tell, the discriminator between residue that becomes liberty and residue that becomes patronage, and the account of a constraint dying by hollow compliance are all this study's own contributions and are offered as propositions to be tested against other cases rather than as established findings.

MODULE 10

The Only Supply Line Still Open

Module 10 · Change and Collapse — an empire that ended in a pure fracture, with no rising, no conquest and no exhaustion; where the floor cracked nine years before the fighting started; and where a quarrel about whether the Mongols should remain Mongols was settled by which brother could feed an army

The checklist, run honestly

A durable order is an armed settlement, and an armed settlement is alterable only by people who command organised force. So structural change does not come from the base. It comes when the floor of force cracks, and it cracks in four ways: the elite **fractures** and one part arms the rest against the other; it **exhausts** its floor in great-power war and must pay the survivors; it is **conquered** by a rival elite and remade at bayonet point; or it **overbreeds**, seating fewer claimants than it produces, until the surplus turns on the incumbents.

Run all four against 1259–64.

Was there a popular rising? No — and the near-miss is instructive. The one serious revolt inside the empire during the civil war was Li Tan's in Shandong in 1262. Li Tan was not a peasant leader. He was the son-in-law of a powerful official and a hereditary Han warlord commanding his own troops, one of a class of Chinese military families the Mongols had taken into service with hereditary officer posts. He rose when he judged Qubilai distracted, and he was destroyed by Han *cherik* troops in Mongol service — that is, by other Chinese soldiers of the same apparatus. **The closest thing to a popular rising in the whole crisis was one member of the hierarchy defecting and being crushed by another member of it.** The peasants of north China, Iran and Rus' did nothing whatever, and there is no reason to think they could have.

Was there conquest by a rival elite? At first sight yes: the Mamluks beat a Mongol force at Ain Jalut in September 1260, the first serious check the Mongols had taken in the west. But test the direction of causation. Hülegü had already withdrawn the bulk of his army from Syria and started for Mongolia *because Möngke had died and there was an assembly to attend*. Ain Jalut was fought by the reduced force he left behind, and the defeat is what turned him back to the Middle East instead of continuing to the assembly. So Ain Jalut is downstream of the fracture rather than a cause of it, and in any case it touched no part of the Mongol homeland. **A rival elite did not break this floor; the floor's own breakage created the opening the rival elite walked into.**

Was there exhaustion in great-power war? No. The Song war was grinding and Möngke died in it, but the empire had just taken Baghdad, held everything from Korea to the Euphrates, and was not fiscally or militarily spent. There was no shattered army, no vacuum, nobody who had to be paid.

Was there overbreeding? Yes, and it is the engine underneath. The lineage entitled to rule had multiplied for three generations while the frontier — the outlet through which surplus claimants had been exported — was reaching its limits. Hülegü to Iran and Qubilai to the south were the last two large exports the system managed.

So the answer is **fracture, with overproduction beneath it**, and this is as close to a pure case as the corpus contains: an empire that came apart with nothing else going wrong.

But the floor cracked in 1251, not 1260

The usual account dates the collapse to Möngke's death at Diaoyu in August 1259 and the two proclamations of 1260. That is where the fighting starts. It is not where the floor cracked, and putting the analysis there gets the case wrong.

The arrangement that had held the Mongol elite together rested on two things. Every prince's share of the empire was **indefeasible** — heritable, and never wholly confiscated, so secure that Temüge Otchigin's survived his own execution for attempting the throne. And every branch held troops, pasture, revenue and dependants **inside the territories the other branches administered**, so that wrecking the empire meant wrecking one's own assets in a rival's hands.

Both were destroyed in 1251. The purge that followed the Toluid seizure of the throne executed between seventy-seven and three hundred aristocrats, officials and commanders, and — the operative act — **eliminated the estates of the Ögedeid and Chagatayid houses**, reassigning acquiescent survivors to Turkestan and the north-west.

That did two things at once, and both are repricings.

It proved that a share *could* be taken, by a khan who had won a war for it. Before 1251 a prince could lose a succession and keep everything; after 1251 he could not. His ledger flipped from *concede and retain* to *win or be dispossessed*, and a contest that cannot be conceded must be fought to the end.

And it began the liquidation of the cross-holdings, which was the enforcement mechanism that had made defection unprofitable. Within a few years Hülegü had absorbed the Jochid forces and pasturelands in Iran, a Chagatayid contingent there had been swallowed, and Alghu had massacred Berke's dependants in Bukhara. Each seizure

removed one more asset a prince held hostage to somebody else's good behaviour — which is to say, one more reason to want the whole to stand.

The elite's cost column emptied the same way an ordinary subject's does: by the disappearance of a credible enforcer. For the princes the enforcer was never a court or an army. It was the interlock. When the interlock was dismantled, defection stopped costing anything, and the men who dismantled it were each defending their own position correctly.

So 1259 supplied not a cause but an occasion: a great khan dead on campaign with no designated successor, and his brothers scattered across three continents in an empire whose assembly could not be convened in less than a year.

Two assemblies, two khans

Möngke died on 11 August 1259 at Diaoyu, besieging a Song fortress.

Qubilai, campaigning in the south, negotiated a ceasefire on the advice of his Chinese counsellor Hao Jing and came north. In May 1260 an assembly convened at Kaiping — near his own power base in north China, not in the ancestral valley — proclaimed him great khan, and he simultaneously adopted a Chinese reign-title, *Zhongtong*.

Ariq Böke had been left as regent in Karakorum. In June or July 1260 an assembly there, of the steppe nobility, proclaimed him.

Two great khans, two assemblies, one summer. And the significant thing is that neither assembly was more valid than the other, because the question of what made an assembly valid had already been answered wrong in 1250, when Batu had convened one in his own territory with limited attendance, the objection had been overruled, and a second, correctly located meeting had been held to ratify what the first had settled. After that the form could be satisfied by anyone with an army. It duly was, twice.

The two men were not merely rivals. They held incompatible accounts of what the empire was, and each had been formed to his by a different set of people. Qubilai had governed north China from his twenties, surrounded by Confucian advisers, and one of them — Lian Xixian — would command armies for him in the war. Ariq Böke had stayed in Karakorum; a Confucian tutor had been arranged for him at Qubilai's own instance and he had not taken to it as his brother had. His faction held, in the summary of the modern historiography, that there was a dangerous drift toward softness among Mongols like Qubilai who thought there was something to be said for settled civilisation; that the centre of the empire should remain in Mongolia and the nomadic life be preserved uncontaminated; and that China ought merely to be exploited.

That is a genuine ideological quarrel about the future of a people, and it was settled by the commissariat.

The war was decided by grain

Qubilai's strategy was not to win a battle. The two engagements at Shimultai and on the western edge of the Khingan range in November 1261 were inconclusive. His strategy was to **cut the supply lines into Mongolia and starve his brother's army.**

Karakorum, the capital of the largest empire on earth, could not feed the army of the largest empire on earth. It sat on the Orkhon in country that produced meat and milk and very little grain, and it had been provisioned for a generation out of the conquered agricultural lands to the south.

Four routes carried that supply. Qubilai's Ögedeid ally Kadan held Gansu and defeated and killed Alandar, the general Ariq Böke had sent to keep the Central Asian routes open. Lian Xixian, campaigning in the north-west, beat Ariq Böke's ally Liu Taiping, seized food consignments intended for Ariq Böke's army, and drove his supporters out of Liangzhou and Ganzhou. Qubilai's own troops held the country around Yan. And Qubilai stopped all trade from north China into Mongolia.

Three of the four lines closed. **The only supply line still open to Ariq Böke was the Yenisei valley in the north-west** — and when Qubilai's army advanced on Karakorum late in 1260, Ariq Böke abandoned the imperial capital and withdrew to his patrimony on the Yenisei, which could grow some grain but not enough.

Everything after that is a man looking for food.

As great khan he still held the right to assign pastures and resources, so he sent Alghu — a prince raised in his own household — to take control of Almaliq and the Chagatayid ulus, identified, the Persian historian Wassaf says, as a place that could supply revenues and soldiers. Alghu took it and then stopped sending supplies. In 1262 Ariq Böke attacked his own ally, took Almaliq and drove Alghu to Khotan and Kashgar — a man at war with his brother opening a second front against the client he had installed to feed him. It cost him most of his remaining support. Möngke's son Ürüng Tash changed sides and handed Qubilai his father's seal. Over the hard winter of 1263 his followers drifted away to Qubilai.

In 1264 Ariq Böke rode to Shangdu and surrendered. He was imprisoned, ignored for a year as a punishment, and died in 1266.

What that means

Set the ideological quarrel beside the logistics and the finding is unavoidable.

The party that fought to keep the empire's centre on the steppe, to preserve the nomadic life uncontaminated and to treat China as a thing to be exploited, was beaten because **the steppe could no longer feed a great khan.** Not out-argued. Not out-fought. Out-supplied, by a brother who held the agricultural surplus of a conquered empire and simply closed the roads.

The conquest defeated the conqueror. The Mongol order's founding advantage had been that its army cost nothing and its capital was a set of tents. Within fifty years its capital was a walled city on the Orkhon that imported its bread from north China, and at that moment the faction holding north China outweighed the faction holding the homeland — permanently, and regardless of who was right about anything. Ariq Böke's programme was not refuted in 1264. It was rendered **unfundable**, which in politics is the same event arriving by a different road.

This deserves to be carried as a general proposition. **Where a conquest order's fiscal and logistical centre migrates into conquered territory, the succession will be won by whoever holds that territory, and any faction whose programme requires the centre to stay where it started will lose — not on the merits, but because the merits are decided by the commissariat.** The corpus should look for the migration date rather than the battle date, and here the migration had happened well before anyone thought to fight about it.

What the ruled did, and did not do

The framework's hard claim is that the common man is present at every rupture as soldier, as crowd, and as the weight one broken faction swings — and never as the author. Test it here without softening.

As soldier, decisive. Qubilai's army included Mongol cavalry and contingents from Manchuria, north China, the Kipchak steppe and Korea. Ariq Böke's was Mongol and short of everything. Men fought and died in very large numbers on both sides and went where their commanders pointed them. Not one of them had any voice in the question being settled.

As crowd, absent. There was no popular movement in the Mongol empire between 1259 and 1264. No city rose. No province declared. No peasant army formed anywhere from Korea to the Euphrates while the two claimants to the largest empire on earth fought each other for four years — which is, if anything, a demonstration of how completely the solved problem stays solved: the floor cracked at the very top and the base did not move at all, because the base had no organisation, no leadership, no programme and no arms, and had been given none.

As causal weight, present in one channel and worth stating precisely. Before 1260 Qubilai had governed north China by forbidding his troops to loot and marauder, promoting agriculture, reducing exactions, rebuilding war-damaged districts and recruiting Chinese administrators. That was not benevolence and it was not concession to pressure; it was a calculation about yield. But the calculation only pointed that way *because* a population governed lightly produces more than a population governed heavily, and that fact about the peasants of Hebei is what made Qubilai's base rich enough to blockade his brother.

So the channel through which the ruled mattered is exactly the one the framework allows and no wider. **A population that will produce more under lighter rule is a standing argument for lighter rule — and the argument is made by the prince who wants the output, not by the population.** The peasant's interest and the prince's coincided. The peasant did not act, was not consulted, and would have been crushed had he tried. He was the reason the winning side could afford to win.

The elite that led, and where it came from

Every faction in this collapse was led by disappointed insiders, and the record is unusually clean about it.

Ariq Böke: son of Tolui, grandson of Chinggis, regent in the capital. Qubilai: the same parents. Alghu: a Chagatayid prince raised in Ariq Böke's household. Kadan: an Ögedeid, fighting for Qubilai against the Toluid holding the homeland. Ürüng Tash: Möngke's own son, who changed sides and delivered his father's seal. Li Tan: a hereditary Han military governor. Berke: a Chinggisid who went to war with Hülegü, another Chinggisid, over Iran, in 1262.

Not one commoner. Not one commander of a thousand acting on his own account. **The whole of the change was transacted between people whose claim was by birth or by office in the arrangement**, and the losing branches were exactly the branches whose share the arrangement had stopped protecting.

And the shape of the ending should be stated for what it is. This is not an order destroyed. It is an order **divided among its own elite**, each fragment continuing to rule its portion for another century or more. There was no liberation, no widening of any settlement, no admission of anybody to anything. The peasant of Hebei woke up under a Toluid, the peasant of Fars under a different Toluid, the villager of Rus' under a Jochid, and the terms were the same or worse. **A pure elite fracture, uncomplicated by any pressure from below, changes who collects and nothing else** — which is the least flattering and most reliable finding this framework has.

Reading collapse against the framework

Five contributions.

First, confirmation: this is the corpus's cleanest instance of change by pure fracture. No rising, no exhaustion, no conquest — an empire at the height of its military reach, having just taken Baghdad, coming apart because two brothers each had an assembly. The only revolt of the period was led by a hereditary warlord and put down by soldiers of the same apparatus. The corpus should hold it as the control case: **when the floor cracks at the very top and nothing else is wrong, the base does not move at all.**

Second — and this is the case's principal contribution — the crack and the collapse can be separated by a decade, and the analysis belongs at the crack. The floor did not break in 1260; it broke in 1251, when a khan who had won the throne by force confiscated two branches' estates and thereby established that losing a succession meant dispossession. Everything in 1260–64 is the working-out of that. **The diagnostic is therefore not the date of the first battle but the date on which losing became unsurvivable** — and the corpus should look, in every fracture case, for the moment when the losers of an internal contest were first stripped rather than demoted, because that is when the next contest became a war.

Third, the elite's cost column empties like anyone else's, and its enforcer is worth naming. For princes there was no court and no superior force. What priced defection was the **interlock**: assets held inside rivals' territories, hostage to everyone's good behaviour. Once the winners of 1251 began liquidating those cross-holdings, defection became free. **Where a case shows an elite bound by mutual hostage-holdings, track the liquidation of those holdings as the emptying of the elite's cost column**, and expect the fracture to become irreversible at the point where no prince any longer holds anything a rival could seize.

Fourth, a conquest order can be defeated by its own conquest, through the migration of the fiscal centre. The founding advantage was a free army and a mobile capital. Fifty years on, the capital was a city that imported grain from a conquered agricultural empire, and the faction holding the granary could starve the faction holding the homeland into surrender without winning a battle. Ariq Böke's traditionalism was not defeated in argument; it became unfundable. **Where a conquest order's supply centre has moved into conquered territory, expect the ideological quarrel about whether to become like the conquered to be decided by whoever holds the food** — and note the irony the corpus should record: the party defending the old way loses because the old country cannot pay for a state, which is precisely why the conquest happened in the first place.

Fifth, the honest statement of the people's part. They fought in enormous numbers on both sides and settled nothing. No city rose in four years of civil war across three continents. The one channel through which they mattered was real and narrow: a lightly governed population out-produces a heavily governed one, which made Qubilai's base rich, which let him close the roads. The peasants of Hebei were the reason the winner could afford to win, and nobody asked them, and the arrangement that emerged had exactly as much room in it for them as the one before. **Fuel, and not spark — and in this case, not even a spark that failed, because no one struck one.**

A note on sources. The narrative follows the standard modern literature on the Toluid civil war, principally Morris Rossabi's *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times* (1988) and Thomas Allsen's and Peter Jackson's contributions to the *Cambridge History of Inner Asia* and related volumes. The sequence used here: Möngke's death at Diaoyu on 11 August 1259 with no declared successor; Qubilai's ceasefire with the Song on Hao Jing's advice, his proclamation at Kaiping in May 1260 and his simultaneous adoption of the Chinese reign-title *Zhongtong*; Ariq Böke's proclamation at Karakorum a month later; Hülegü's departure for Mongolia and his return west after Ain Jalut in early September 1260; Berke's invasion of the Ilkhanate in the winter of 1261–62; the inconclusive engagements at Shimultai and the western Khingan in November 1261; Kadan's defeat and killing of Alandar in Gansu; Lian Xixian's victory over Liu Taiping and seizure of Ariq Böke's food supplies in the north-west, with the expulsion of his supporters from Liangzhou and Ganzhou; Qubilai's closure of trade from north China into Mongolia and his control of three of the four supply routes, leaving only the Yenisei; Ariq Böke's withdrawal from Karakorum to his Yenisei patrimony; his despatch of Alghu to Almaliq and Wassaf's account of why that place was chosen; Alghu's defection and cessation of supply; Ariq Böke's attack on Almaliq in 1262 and Alghu's flight to Khotan and Kashgar; Ürüng Tash's defection with Möngke's seal; the desertions over the winter of 1263; and Ariq Böke's surrender at Shangdu in 1264, his imprisonment and his death in 1266.

The historiography of this war is contested and the module's structural reading does not depend on resolving it. The surviving sources — Rashid al-Din, the *Yuan shi*, Marco Polo — are strongly pro-Qubilai, and a serious modern line of argument holds that Ariq Böke was Möngke's intended heir and that Qubilai's accession was a usurpation seen as such by contemporaries. That reading, if correct, strengthens rather than weakens this module's account, since it makes the outcome still less a matter of legitimacy and still more a matter of supply.

Li Tan's revolt of 1262 in Shandong, his position as the son-in-law of a powerful official and a hereditary Han military governor, the use of Han *cherik* forces against

him, and Qubilai's subsequent curbing of Han Chinese influence at his court, follow the standard literature on the Mongol conquest of China. The hereditary officer posts of the Han "Black Army" and "New Army" formations are recorded in the same literature.

The purge of 1251 — between seventy-seven and three hundred executed among aristocrats, officials and commanders, the elimination of the Ögedeid and Chagatayid estates, and the reassignment of survivors — is treated at length in this study's audit of the elite arrangement and follows the same sources. The subsequent liquidation of cross-ulus holdings (Jochid forces and pasturelands in Iran absorbed by Hülegü, the Chagatayid contingent swallowed, Berke's dependants massacred at Bukhara by Alughu) follows Peter Jackson's account of the era of inter-Mongol warfare, paraphrased and credited; the reading of that liquidation as the emptying of the elite's cost column is this study's own.

David Morgan's characterisation of the traditionalist position Ariq Böke came to represent is paraphrased from *The Mongols* (2nd edn, 2007), pp. 104–105, as in this study's treatment of formation. Qubilai's pre-1260 governance of north China — prohibition of looting, promotion of agriculture, reduction of exactions, recruitment of Confucian and Chinese administrators — follows the standard accounts.

The framework applied here is this project's *Elite Chaos*, and in particular its four cracks, its insistence that a rising against an intact floor loses with a regularity approaching a law, and its concession that pressure from below is a genuine cause operating through a channel other than proximate agency. The extension proposed above — that the crack and the collapse may be separated in time, and that the analysis belongs at the crack — is offered as a revision to be tested against other cases.

MODULE 11

A Desert Swamp Where Merv Had Been

Module 11 · The Grim Accounting — the bill in two columns, sword and metabolic; why the largest entry is the one no instrument in this framework can register, because nothing was destroyed to produce it; and why the accounting has to be done at all, given how quickly and completely everyone forgot

Why this is done

An armed group took power, held it, and came apart. That is the whole of what has been described, and this module asks what it cost.

The accounting is necessary for a specific reason, and it is not moral bookkeeping. It is that **the forgetting is reliable, fast, and complete.** Let an arrangement stand for three generations and the people inside it stop experiencing it as an arrangement. It becomes the furniture of the world — not a thing that was done to anybody but simply how matters stand, defended sincerely by people who could not tell you when it began.

The speed of it in this case is worth registering before any numbers. Baghdad was sacked in 1258; by 1295 the Mongol ruler of Iran had converted to Islam and was restoring the tax base as a Muslim sovereign. The Golden Horde, whose armies had burned Rus', became a Muslim state whose khan's written patent was the ordinary and expected route by which a Rus' prince became a legitimate ruler — and one of those princes, who collected the khan's tribute and blinded his own countrymen to enforce the census, was canonised. In China the dynasty that had proposed clearing the north for pasture was running Confucian rituals and a Chinese reign-era by 1260.

Within a lifetime of the killing, in every one of the conquered lands, Mongol rule was simply the way the world was. That is not a scandal; it is what durable orders do, and it is why the arithmetic has to be laid out while it can still be read.

The sword column, and what it is worth

The medieval figures are enormous and none of them is a count.

For the Khwarazmian campaign of 1219–21: Juvayni gives 1,747,000 dead at Nishapur and reports a cleric counting for thirteen days at Merv to arrive at 1,300,000; Ibn al-Athir gives 700,000 for Nishapur. At Samarkand the reported tolls range from sixty thousand to several hundred thousand. At Gurganj something on the order of a hundred thousand women, children and artisans were taken out of the killing and

deported, with the surviving males counted by severing an ear. For Baghdad in 1258, Hamdallah Mustawfi, writing seventy years later, gives 800,000; Hülegü himself, writing to Louis IX, gave a figure of his own and it was larger.

Modern estimates for Nishapur run to something in the range of one to two hundred thousand. Several of the medieval figures exceed any plausible population of the city concerned. David Morgan's judgement is that they are not statistical information but evidence of the state of mind the invasion produced.

And the study of information in this empire has already established why they are unreliable in a specific direction. **Everyone with a pen had a reason to make the number larger.** The defeated chronicler needed the calamity unprecedented, because an ordinary defeat would indict his own order and a cosmic one indicts nobody. The chronicler in Mongol employment needed it providential, because service under an ordinary conqueror is treason and service under a divine visitation is submission. And the conqueror himself was reporting his own body counts to foreign kings, because terror advertised is terror that need not be repeated.

So the sword figures must be given as ranges, with the chronicler named and his interest stated, and they should be understood as the least reliable numbers in this study.

Three discounts that have to be applied

First, the chroniclers' arithmetic. Stated above. A figure of 1.7 million for a city that probably held under two hundred thousand is not a discount of a few per cent; it is an order of magnitude, and the same correction applies across the whole Khwarazmian and Iraqi material.

Second, and less often applied: registration is not population. The Jin census of 1207 returned something like 8.4 million households and 53.5 million persons in north China. The Mongol registration of 1236 in the same territory implies, on the earlier household ratios, something in the region of six or seven million people — and Chinese demographic historians who allow for the enormous categories deliberately excluded from the count (the private subjects of Mongol princes and commanders, military households, postal-station households, artisan households, colony households, and the Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian clergy) put the real figure nearer ten and a half million.

That is still a catastrophic fall. But a census that finds six million where fifty-three million were once counted is telling you how many people remain **on the rolls**, and a conquest destroys rolls faster than it destroys people. Flight south to the Song,

concealment, absorption into an exempt category, and the simple collapse of the registering apparatus all read, in the returns, as death.

Third, chronology. The commonest error in this accounting is to charge the whole of China's medieval population decline to the conquest. The Chinese population was around 120 million on the eve of the conquest and roughly half that by the late fourteenth century — but the Mongol census data suggest **the main losses came after 1290**, from plague, flood, and the misgovernment of the late Yuan, a century after the campaigns this study covers. Columbia's summary of the field is flat about it: earlier estimates of catastrophic decline during the conquest have subsequently been revised.

And three reasons not to discount to nothing

First, the revised figures are still enormous. Jinping Wang's study of north China, built on stone inscriptions rather than on chronicles, states that the conquest of 1211–1234 wiped out more than a third of the population and dismantled the existing social order. That is a source class independent of the chroniclers with every interest in exaggeration, and it does not exonerate anybody.

Second, some of it is catastrophic on any reading. Sichuan held about 2.59 million households in 1223. A survey in 1280 recorded a little over 155,000 households and 775,000 individuals — some two and a half per cent of the pre-invasion figure for the four circuits of Sichuan and Shaanxi. Even allowing generously for flight and non-registration, something happened there that has few parallels. Most of it belongs to the long Song war and therefore to the decades after this study's bounds, and it should be recorded as the consequence of the same machine under a later khan.

Third, the killing was systematic, published, and boasted of. Whatever the numbers, the practice is not in doubt: a city that resisted was destroyed, its adult males killed, its artisans separated out and deported, its women and children enslaved and divided. The Mongols did not deny this. They advertised it.

The metabolic column, and why it is the larger one

Now the entry this framework exists to catch, and it is the reason for the module's title.

An advanced agricultural society does not feed itself off what the land yields unaided. It feeds itself off **coordination** — irrigation, drainage, terracing, seed and labour organised across a landscape by people who know how — and that coordination lifts the population well above what the ground would otherwise carry. The lift is a loan against continued organisation. Break the organisation and the note is called, and

it is paid not in battle deaths but in famine, in disease among the weakened, and in the quiet failure of the next harvest and the one after.

Here is the crucial mechanical point, and the whole of this module's contribution turns on it.

The infrastructure did not have to be destroyed. It only had to be unmaintained.

A *qanat* is not a building. It is a gently sloping tunnel, sometimes many kilometres long, tapping groundwater at the foot of a range and carrying it to a settlement — and it silts, collapses and fails unless it is cleaned every year, by hand, in the dark, by men trained to a trade that takes a lifetime to learn and is transmitted from father to son. The same is true of the canal and dike systems of the Sawad in lower Iraq, of the Murghab river works that watered Merv, and of the irrigation associations of the north Chinese villages.

So the mechanism that calls the metabolic note in a country like this is not sabotage. It is **the removal of the men who did the maintenance** — killed, enslaved, deported east as skilled artisans, or simply fled — after which the desert takes the system back on its own, without anybody lifting a tool.

The scholarly formulation is exact and it is worth attending to the word. The *Encyclopaedia Iranica*'s summary of the economic dislocation in Iran names not only the short-term consequence of abandoned tillage but "the longer-term **neglect** of irrigation channels." Neglect. Not demolition.

Beside that stands the direct destruction where it occurred: the irrigation system of the Murghab was destroyed, and Hafiz-i Abru reports that Merv in consequence became a **desert swamp** — the exact signature of an irrigation network that has failed rather than merely stopped, water going where it is not wanted and the land salting behind it. Across Khorasan more broadly, the ruin of the qanat networks is held to have ended a pattern of relatively continuous settlement and replaced it with isolated oasis towns in a country where isolated oases had previously been rare.

And there was a deliberate component. Ögedei, exasperated by rebellion, is recorded as having considered turning Khorasan into grassland — the same expedient that had been proposed for north China in his father's time and that Yelü Chucai had argued down with an arithmetic. Conquest also moved very large numbers of Turco-Mongol herdsmen into Azerbaijan and Khorasan, and some agricultural land was converted to pasture as a matter of course, without anyone deciding anything.

Nothing in this study's earlier modules registers any of that. Casualty ranges do not. Extraction tonnages do not. The count of cities burned does not. The largest entry

in the bill was produced by an absence, and every instrument this framework owns is built to detect commissions.

The strongest counter, stated at full strength

This is the point in the module where the case against its own reading has to be made properly, because the counter-argument is serious and is held by specialists.

Peter Christensen, in *The Decline of Iranshahr*, argues that the economic and demographic decline of the Iranian and Mesopotamian world had begun **long before any Mongol appeared**, and that the picture of a flourishing Baghdad and a prosperous Iraq destroyed in 1258 is a romanticised image that specialists have abandoned and that survives chiefly in popular history and journalism. On his account the "Mongol myth" — nomadic invasion as the cause of the region's long ruin — fails on simple chronological grounds, and the deeper causes are environmental, epidemiological and structural.

If that is right, then the metabolic note was already substantially in default before the Mongols arrived, and what they did was accelerate a decline rather than cause one.

The honest response is to concede a great deal and to hold one thing.

Concede: the pre-Mongol trend, the chronological difficulty, the excess in the chroniclers, and the reasonable suspicion of any account in which one invasion explains half a millennium of a region's history. It is very likely that the Mongols have been made to carry a bill much of which was accumulated before they came.

Hold: **the framework's metabolic test does not ask what an order destroyed. It asks what it added to productive capacity.** On that test the answer is the same under either reading. The Mongols added nothing to the irrigation of Khorasan or the Sawad, and they removed — by killing, enslaving, deporting and displacing — a substantial part of the labour and the skill that maintained what was there. Whether the system was already ailing changes the *size* of the entry. It does not change its sign. A creditor who takes the last of a struggling farm's labour is not exonerated by the farm's prior difficulties.

And there is a second thing the concession does not touch. Even where the maintenance was resumed under later Mongol rulers — Ghazan's reforms after 1295 restored a great deal of Iranian revenue, and the recorded figure rose substantially — the recovery was temporary, and a fourteenth-century observer records that perhaps not half of what Ghazan had collected was still being collected in his own day, because the provinces had been laid waste by usurpation and the continual passage of armies. **A capacity that has to be rebuilt twice has been destroyed twice.**

The credit side, at full weight

The framework requires that the coordination an order genuinely performed be counted at full value and in the same breath.

The relay system. The *yam* was real infrastructure — stations at intervals of a day's ride across the whole span of Eurasia, with keepers, mounts, fodder and shelter, financed by a levy and maintained for generations. It carried information at speeds unmatched before the telegraph and it was used by merchants, envoys, clerics and travellers as well as by the state.

The routes. The unification of the overland trade corridors under a single authority, the reduction and in places abolition of internal tolls, and the policing of the roads produced a movement of goods, techniques and people across Eurasia that had no precedent. Persian astronomy went east and Chinese medicine, printing and cartography went west; agricultural and medical manuals were translated in both directions.

The administrative saves. Yelü Chucai's demonstration that a taxed peasantry out-yields a pasture is the reason north China was not cleared, and it is one of the largest single acts of preservation in this study. The census, whatever its burden on those counted, was a real instrument of knowledge and of tax equalisation. Möngke's fiscal programme paid off debts a dead khan had incurred, prohibited requisitioning from civilians, and punished plundering by his own commanders and his own son.

The exemptions. The clerical immunities allowed institutions to rebuild. The Rus' Church, holding written patents against tribute, recovered and expanded through a period when everything else in Rus' was being ground down.

And the peace of the steppe, which for the Mongols themselves was a real good delivered to real people after a century in which raiding had been the ordinary condition of life.

But apply one discipline before totalling that column, because it corrects an error that runs through nearly every triumphalist account of a conquest.

A transfer is not an addition. The four hundred craftsmen taken out of Merv, the hundred thousand artisans deported from Gurganj, the engineers picked out of Baghdad — these men appear on the credit side of the standard account as the workforce that built Karakorum and enriched the eastern capitals. They belong on neither side. They are the same productive capacity moved from one place to another, minus those who died on the road, minus the city they were taken from, and minus the apprentices who were never trained because the trade was removed from the country that had generated it. **The conqueror's new capital was built out of the old capitals,**

and reckoning the new one as creation while ignoring the subtraction is how a conquest gets scored as a net gain.

Reading the accounting against the framework

Five contributions.

First — the principal one — where productive capacity consists of a maintained practice rather than a built stock, the metabolic note is called by depopulation alone, and no destruction is required. A qanat, a canal network, a dike system and a village irrigation association are not objects; they are activities that must be performed annually by people who know how. Kill, deport or scatter those people and the capacity fails on its own schedule, silently, over the following decades. **Every instrument this framework owns registers commissions** — bodies, burned cities, breached dams, tonnages removed — **and will return a null on the largest entry in a case like this.** The diagnostic that catches it is a question, and the corpus should ask it in every conquest of an intensively cultivated country: **what had to be done every year for this land to feed these people, by whom, and are those people still there?**

Second, a transfer is not an addition, and conquests are routinely scored as though it were. Deported artisans building the conqueror's capital are the same capacity relocated at a loss. The corpus should treat forced relocation of skill as a **negative-sum transfer** with a positive-looking local effect, and be suspicious of any accounting in which the conqueror's new city is entered as creation.

Third, registration is not population, and a conquest that wrecks the registering apparatus manufactures apparent deaths. A fall from fifty-three million counted to six million counted is a fall in counting as well as in people, and the categories deliberately excluded from Mongol registration were enormous. **Where a case rests its demographic claim on the difference between two censuses taken by different regimes, the difference is an upper bound and usually a bad one.**

Fourth, date the losses. Much of what is charged to a conquest belongs to periods and causes downstream of it, and the Chinese case is the clearest instance in the corpus: the great fall came a century after the campaigns, from plague and flood and the failure of a later government. **Charging a whole trend to its most dramatic episode is the standard error of this kind of accounting, and it is usually made by people sympathetic to the victims.**

Fifth, on what the accounting is for, and what it is not. It is not a verdict. The numbers do that themselves, and this study has held throughout that legibility is not pardon: reconstructing why a city was destroyed to price the surrender of the next twenty is an explanation of how the harm was organised, not a suggestion that it was

justified. The accounting exists because of the thing named at the opening of this module — that within three generations the Ilkhanate was a Muslim state, the Horde was the ordinary source of a Rus' prince's legitimacy, and the Yuan was a Chinese dynasty keeping Confucian rites, and nobody living under any of them needed to be told that the arrangement was rightful. **An order that lasts long enough produces a population that cannot remember it was imposed, and the accounting is the only thing that keeps the imposition on the page after the memory has gone.**

A note on sources. Casualty figures are given as the sources give them and none is a count. Juvayni's 1,747,000 for Nishapur and 1,300,000 for Merv, and the thirteen-day count at Merv, are from the *Tarikh-i Jahan Gusha* as reported in the standard literature and in J. A. Boyle's translation; Ibn al-Athir's 700,000 for Nishapur is from the *al-Kamil*; Hamdallah Mustawfi's 800,000 for Baghdad is from the *Tarikh-i Guzida* (completed 1330); Hülegü's own claim to Louis IX is reported in the literature with variant figures. Modern estimates for Nishapur in the range of 100,000–200,000, and David Morgan's assessment in *The Mongols* that the medieval figures are evidence of a state of mind rather than statistical information, are as cited in this study's treatment of information and suppression, where the reasons every party had to inflate are set out.

North Chinese population figures follow the standard Chinese demographic literature: the Jin census of 1207 at approximately 8.4 million households and 53.5 million persons; the registration of 1236 in the former Jin territory implying roughly six to seven million on the earlier household ratios; and Zhao Wenlin and Xie Shujun's estimate of about 10.54 million once the excluded categories (private subjects of Mongol princes and commanders, military, postal-station, artisan and colony households, and Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian clergy households) are allowed for. Sichuan's fall from about 2.59 million households in 1223 to just over 155,000 households and 775,000 individuals in the survey of 1280 — some 2.38 per cent of the pre-1231 figure for the four circuits of Sichuan and Shaanxi — is from the same literature; most of that destruction belongs to the Song war and postdates this study's bounds. Jinping Wang, *In the Wake of the Mongols: The Making of a New Social Order in North China, 1200–1600* (Harvard, 2018), states that the conquest of 1211–1234 wiped out more than a third of the population, and works from stone inscriptions rather than from chronicles. Columbia University's Asia for Educators summary that earlier estimates of catastrophic decline have been revised is registered in the text. The observation that the Chinese population fell from around 120 million about 1200 to roughly half that by the late fourteenth century, but that the Mongol census data suggest the main losses came after 1290, is drawn from Michael Wood's summary of the field; readers should treat all of these figures as contested.

On Iran: the destruction of the Murghab irrigation system and Hafiz-i Abru's report that Merv became a desert swamp, the longer-term *neglect* of the qanats, Ögedei's contemplated conversion of Khorasan into grassland (Juvayni, ed. Qazvini, II, p. 221; Boyle, II, p. 485), the precedent of the same proposal for north China, and the movement of Turco-Mongol herdsmen into Azerbaijan and Khorasan with the conversion of some agricultural land to pasture, all follow the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* articles on the Mongols and on the economy of the period, which draw on I. P. Petrushevsky's *Zemledelie i agrarnye otnosheniya v Irane XIII–XIV vekov* (1960) and his chapter in the *Cambridge History of Iran* vol. 5. The claim, repeated in general reference works, that ninety per cent of Iran's population died between 1220 and 1258, and J. M. Smith's estimate of a fall from 2,500,000 to 250,000, are noted here as maximalist positions and are not relied on. Ghazan's post-1295 revenue recovery and the report by Mustawfi that perhaps not half of Ghazan's revenue was still being collected by 1340, the provinces having been laid waste by usurpation and the continual passage of armies, are from the *Iranica* economy article.

The counter-argument is given at full strength from Peter Christensen, *The Decline of Iranshahr: Irrigation and Environment in the Middle East, 500 BC–AD 1500*, which holds that the economic and demographic decline of the region long predates the Mongols, that the image of a flourishing Iraq destroyed in 1258 is a romanticised stereotype abandoned by specialists, and that the "Mongol myth" fails on chronological grounds. A reader who wants the strongest case against this module should go to Christensen directly. The response offered here — that the metabolic test measures what an order added to productive capacity rather than what it destroyed, so that a prior decline changes the size of the entry and not its sign — is this study's own.

On the credit side, the relay system, the unification of the overland routes, the reduction of tolls, and the transmission of astronomy, medicine, printing and cartography across Eurasia follow the standard literature and are treated at greater length in this study's modules on information and on extraction. Yelü Chucai's revenue argument and Möngke's fiscal measures are treated there also. The deportations of artisans from Merv, Gurganj and Baghdad are as recorded in this study's account of the cost column.

The propositions offered in the closing section — that a maintained practice fails without destruction and is invisible to commission-registering instruments; that forced relocation of skill is a negative-sum transfer routinely scored as creation; that registration differences are upper bounds; and that trends are habitually charged to their most dramatic episode — are this study's own contributions and are offered to be tested against other cases.

MODULE 12

Tarmashirin Abolished the Yasa

Module 12 · Convergence and Divergence — the controlled experiment this case was brought in to run: identical conquerors, one founding, one law, one lineage, set down among four different populations, and watched choosing four different answers within a century; and then the strongest case for the whole enterprise, stated at full strength and answered

The experiment

This collection's central method holds that a person in a position decides by what he counts as benefit against what he counts as cost, from within the field of what his position lets him see — and that because a given position poses the same problem to everyone in it, and only a few answers work, rulers in like positions converge on like solutions without ever consulting one another.

Every case so far has tested that the same way: by setting different rulers in similar positions beside each other and seeing whether they landed in the same place. The Mongol succession states allow the experiment to be run the other way, and it is the only place in the record where it can be.

Here the rulers are not merely similar. They are **the same men**: descendants of one grandfather, sharing one law, one founding, one language, one creed, one army structure and one set of formative institutions, most of them personally acquainted, several of them full brothers. They were then set down, within a single generation, among four different populations.

If position governs, they should diverge, and they should diverge along the line of the populations. If lineage governs — if what a man does is a function of whose son he is — they should sort by descent.

They diverged, and the sorting is legible.

Four answers

The Ilkhanate. Hülegü's line, in Iran and Iraq: a Toluid house ruling a Persian-speaking, overwhelmingly Muslim population with a thousand-year bureaucratic tradition. Hülegü killed the Caliph in 1258. Thirty-seven years later his great-grandson Ghazan converted to Islam and declared it the state religion, and set about a reform programme conducted in the vocabulary of Islamic government — *kharaj* on land,

tamgha on commerce, the abolition of arbitrary Mongol impositions, a census, and a restructured revenue system run through Persian officials on Persian accounting principles.

The Golden Horde. Jochi's line, on the Kipchak steppe with the Rus' principalities as tributaries. Berke, ruling from 1257, was the first Mongol sovereign to embrace Islam; his successor Mengü-Temür was not a Muslim, and the reversal is worth noting; the conversion became official and permanent under Öz Beg from 1313, and every subsequent khan was Muslim. What the modern scholarship calls *Kipchakization* — the assimilation of the Mongol ruling group into a Turkic-Muslim culture — proceeded steadily underneath.

The Yuan. Qubilai's line, in China: a Toluid house, brother to the house that took Iran. Chinese capital at Khanbaliq, Chinese reign-eras, Confucian rites, a Chinese-style bureaucracy staffed in graded ethnic categories, Tibetan Buddhism at court and a new script commissioned from a Tibetan lama. No Islam.

The Chagatai ulus. Chagatai's line, straddling the boundary between the sedentary cities of Transoxiana and the open steppe to the east — and this is the case that decides the experiment, because it is the only one of the four whose territory contained *both* kinds of country.

It split, and it split along exactly that line. Kebek, in the early fourteenth century, standardised the coinage and established a fixed capital at Qarshi in the settled west. His brother Tarmashirin, khan from 1331, moved the court to Transoxiana, promoted trade and agriculture, was a Muslim so well known for it that even in Cairo he was reported as a devout adherent of the sharia — and, according to Michal Biran's study of his reign, **abolished the *yasa***.

That is a descendant of Chinggis Khan setting aside Chinggis Khan's law in favour of the law of the people he lived among.

In 1334 he was brought down by a rebellion of the tribes of the eastern provinces — the nomadic military elite of Moghulistan, who were not Muslims, who still lived on the grass, and for whom the *yasa* was the constitution of their world. Within a decade the ulus had come apart into a sedentary, Muslim, Persianate west and a nomadic, shamanist-and-Buddhist east that would not convert for another generation.

One ulus, one lineage, one law — cut in half by the difference between the steppe and the sown, at the precise moment a khan tried to legislate the question.

The verdict, stated plainly

Set the four side by side and the lineage hypothesis fails on its own evidence.

Two branches of the **same Toluid house** — Hülegü's and Qubilai's, sons of one mother, raised in one tent — produced a Muslim Persianate state and a Chinese Buddhist one. Whatever governed the outcome, it was not descent from Tolui, and it was not Sorghaghtani's household, and it was not anything either brother inherited.

Meanwhile the **Jochid** house, from a different line, arrived at substantially the same answer as the Ilkhanid: Islam, Turkic language, a sedentary-facing fiscal apparatus. Different ancestors, same outcome.

And the **Chagatai** case supplies the controlled experiment inside the experiment: hold the lineage constant and vary the terrain within a single state, and the state divides along the terrain.

Position governs. The seed for this study said that if the uluses diverged along the lines of the populations they had to hold, position logic would be confirmed from the hardest possible direction, and that if they diverged by lineage the proposition would need qualifying. They diverged by population. The proposition holds.

But the variable needs correcting, and the Horde corrects it

The obvious formulation — *each branch adopted the framework of the population it had to hold* — is not quite right, and the Golden Horde is the case that shows why.

The Horde's most numerous subject population, and the source of a very large part of its revenue, was the Orthodox Christian peasantry of Rus'. The Horde did not become Orthodox. It became Muslim.

So the variable is not the population you extract from. Rus' was held at arm's length, through its own princes, with a written patent and a tribute and almost no Mongol presence between collections — exactly the arrangement that requires no cultural adjustment at all, because the intermediary absorbs the contact. What the Horde's ruling group actually lived among, camped beside, married into, hired, and had its children raised by was the **Kipchak Turkic steppe population**, which was substantially Muslim and becoming more so.

State it precisely, then, because the correction matters and it is testable elsewhere:

A conquering elite converges on the framework of the population it lives among, not the population it rules. Where those are the same people, the two formulations agree and nothing is learned. Where they differ — where an order extracts from one population at a distance through intermediaries while camping among another — the elite goes the way of the second, every time.

And the mechanism underneath is developmental rather than political. Nobody adopts a creed because a spreadsheet recommends it. What happens is that the conqueror's children are raised by the women, nurses, tutors, clerks and clergy of

whichever population is physically present in the household — and children so raised acquire, before they are old enough to weigh anything, a settled sense of who the natural authorities are and what the world is made of. Two generations of that and the ruling house believes what its servants believe. The Ilkhans did not calculate their way to Islam; they were brought up among Muslims. Qubilai's grandchildren were brought up among Chinese. The Chagatai split because the two halves of one family were being raised in two different countries.

Which is why the divergence took roughly three generations everywhere and not one. It is the length of a formation cycle, not the length of a policy debate.

What this case gives back

Three debts were named when this study was commissioned. They can now be settled.

On the apparatus as the running cost of what the conquest found. The claim brought in from elsewhere in the corpus is that a conquering order's machinery is not an expression of its philosophy but the recurring bill for whatever it happened to conquer. This case confirms it and extends it, because here **one founding met four different things and generated four different bills** — and the divergence of the successor states simply *is* those bills diverging.

Iran came with a Persian fiscal bureaucracy, an *ulama*, and irrigation that required continuous maintenance: the running cost was a Persianate administration and, eventually, an Islamic sovereign who could command the clergy. China came with a vast registered peasantry, a Confucian literate class and a canal system: the running cost was a Chinese bureaucracy, Chinese ritual and a Chinese reign-era. The Kipchak steppe came with nothing to administer and a population already Turkic and increasingly Muslim: the running cost was to become Turkic and Muslim, which was nearly free. And the Rus' came with princes and a church that could deliver quiet: the running cost was a census, a patent and a prince, which is the cheapest arrangement in the entire study.

The four uluses are not four ideologies. They are four invoices.

On the anchor and the succession. The seed proposed that the Mongol anchor — the *altan urugh*, rule reserved to one man's descendants — was the worst possible kind at a transition, because a lineage anchor multiplies eligible claimants instead of designating one, and makes every one of them legitimate.

That is half right and the correction is worth more than the confirmation.

The multiplication is real: by 1251 there were dozens of men entitled by birth, each with a share and troops, and the frontier that had exported the surplus was reaching its

limits. But the audit of the arrangement showed something the hypothesis does not predict — **the officer corps never fractured at all.** In fifty years and four contested successions, not one commander of a thousand or ten thousand made a bid. The lineage anchor did not make rule generally contestable. It made rule contestable *only* among a set of men whose existence could not be prevented, while making it entirely uncontestable by everybody else.

So the anchor's shape is not the whole answer. What converted a survivable multiplication of claimants into a fatal one was a specific act at a specific date: **1251, when the winners of a succession confiscated the losers' estates.** Before that a prince could lose and keep his share; after it he could not; and a contest that cannot be conceded must be fought to the end. The anchor supplied the claimants. The precedent supplied the war.

On position logic run backwards. Confirmed, as above, with the living-among correction.

The counter-position

Now the case for the whole enterprise, and it must be given at full strength, because it is strong and it is made by people who were not Mongols and had no reason to flatter them.

For roughly a century after the conquests, a merchant could travel from the Black Sea to the Yellow River under one authority. The overland routes were open as they had never been, policed, and served by a relay system with stations a day's ride apart. Internal tolls were reduced or abolished across distances that had previously been carved up among a dozen taxing powers. A Venetian family traded across it; a Nestorian monk from near Beijing travelled the length of it as an ambassador and met the Pope and the kings of France and England; a Moroccan lawyer walked most of it a generation later.

Technique moved with the traffic and in both directions. Persian astronomy and Islamic mathematics went east; Chinese medicine, printing, papermaking and cartography went west; agricultural and pharmacological manuals were translated; an observatory in Iran and an astronomical bureau in China exchanged instruments and personnel. The transfer of practical knowledge across Eurasia in that century has no parallel before the modern period.

Religious exemption was real, legislated and enforced — clergy of four religions on the same payroll, a khan convening a formal doctrinal debate with appointed arbiters and rules against insult, and hostile literature written and circulated without penalty. The Rus' Church emerged richer and freer than it had entered. A blacksmith's son

commanded armies and a foundling of an exterminated people became supreme judge, in a century when birth determined station nearly everywhere else on earth.

And for the Mongols themselves the order ended a hundred years in which raiding was the ordinary condition of life, and it did so decisively.

That is the case. It is not propaganda and it is not a modern invention; most of it is attested by hostile and neutral witnesses.

The answer

Four refusals, and then the honest part.

Refuse the syllogism — that it survived, therefore it was justified. This one cannot even be attempted here, because it did not survive. The unified empire lasted fifty-four years from the founding to the two proclamations, and its own great khan's authority was repudiated by half the family within a decade of that. Durability is in any case a fact about incentive structures and not a verdict; here there is not even the durability to argue from.

Refuse the rigged comparison. The standard defence sets the Mongol order against the disorder that preceded or followed it, or against other conquests. That is not the comparison. The Khwarazmian empire, the Jin, the Abbasid Caliphate, the Rus' principalities and the Tangut kingdom all existed, were governing themselves, had their own courts and revenues and armies and scholars, and were destroyed. The alternative to Mongol rule in Khorasan was not anarchy; it was Khorasan. That the Khwarazmshah was a poor ruler who murdered envoys is a fact about him, not a warrant.

Refuse credit for parsimony. The mildness this order showed to those who submitted early, and the plurality at its court, were not virtues; they were the shape of its endowment. It did not censor because it did not need the conquered's belief. It did not persecute because it had no creed to impose. It hired four priesthoods because it had killed its own interpreter and could only lease. Where the same devices produced both the gentleness and the underdevelopment, the gentleness is a fact about the position, not the character.

Refuse cynicism, which is the refusal most often forgotten. None of the above makes any of it fake. The peace of the grasslands was real and the herding families who stopped losing their daughters to raiders were not dupes. The Rus' Church's immunity was written, enforced and transformative. Ghazan's reforms genuinely raised revenue and genuinely reduced arbitrary exaction. The men who rose from nothing rose from nothing. A thing that was built and then became real is more durable and more

genuine than a lie, and naming the arrangement's origin in force does not dissolve anything anyone lived inside it.

And now the honest part, which is a question of distribution rather than of fact.

The Pax was real, and it was **a by-product**. Nobody set out to integrate Eurasian commerce; they set out to take everything, and a single jurisdiction is what a single conqueror leaves behind whether he wants one or not. The roads were safe because there was one owner. The tolls fell because the toll-takers were dead or absorbed. The techniques travelled because the technicians had been deported. The relay system was built to move armies and intelligence and was used by merchants because it was there.

That does not diminish the benefit. It relocates the credit.

And then the distribution, which is the part the counter-position never states. **The people who enjoyed the Pax Mongolica were overwhelmingly not the people who paid for it.** The Genoese factor at Caffa, the Venetian in Khanbaliq, the friar on the road to Karakorum, the astronomer given an observatory, the merchant partnership lent capital by a khatun — these were the beneficiaries, and almost none of them had been conquered. The bill was paid in Khorasan and the Sawad and Hebei and Sichuan and Rus', by people who never saw a caravan and got no letter.

A century of safe roads for the long-distance traveller, purchased with the irrigation of a province and the population of a region, is not a scandal that needs a special vocabulary. It is the ordinary shape of a very large extraction, and it should be entered in the ledger with both columns visible on the same page, which is what this whole study has been for.

The last word belongs to the four uluses, because they answer the question the counter-position raises without meaning to. If the Mongol order had been a project — a policy of unification, a design for Eurasian exchange, a philosophy of rule — then it would have been transmitted, and the four states would look alike. They do not. Within three generations one was Persian and Muslim, one was Chinese and Buddhist, one was Turkic and Muslim, and one had torn in half over the question. **The founding transmitted a lineage and a claim, and nothing else survived contact with the countries it had taken.** What each branch became, it became by absorbing the people it lived among — which is to say that the conquered, who could not resist the conquest, in the end supplied the conquerors with everything they subsequently believed.

That is not a consolation and it is not offered as one. It is only the last thing the arithmetic says.

A note on sources. The four outcomes follow the standard literature and are summarised here rather than argued in detail, since each successor state lies beyond this study's bounds and each has its own scholarship. On the Ilkhanate: Ghazan's conversion and declaration of Islam as the state religion in 1295, and his fiscal reforms — the census of 1295–98, the standardisation of *kharaj* and *tamgha*, the abolition of arbitrary Mongol impositions including excessive *qubchur* — follow the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* articles on the Ilkhanate and on the economy of the period, together with the Persian accounting literature; the temporary character of the revenue recovery, on Mustawfi's testimony, is registered in this study's accounting module. On the Golden Horde: Berke as the first Mongol sovereign to embrace Islam (r. 1257–66), the non-Muslim reign of Mengü-Temür immediately after, the official and permanent adoption under Öz Beg from 1313, and the process of "Kipchakization," follow the recent scholarship on the Islamization of the Jochid ulus, paraphrased and credited. Note the standing caveat in that literature: the conversion was gradual rather than instantaneous, religious tolerance persisted under Öz Beg, and Mamluk reports of sweeping conversion were shaped by Jochid diplomatic self-presentation.

On the Chagatai ulus: Kebek's coinage reform and fixed capital at Qarshi; Tarmashirin's accession in 1331, his removal of the court to Transoxiana, his promotion of trade and agriculture, his reputation for devotion to the sharia as far as Mamluk Egypt, and his overthrow by a rebellion of the eastern tribes in 1334; the subsequent split into a Muslim, sedentary Transoxiana and a nomadic, largely Buddhist and shamanist Moghulistan; and the eventual conversion of the east under Tughlugh Timur in the 1350s–60s — follow the standard literature and Michal Biran, "The Chaghadaids and Islam: The Conversion of Tarmashirin Khan (1331–34)," which is also the source for the report that Tarmashirin abolished the *yasa*. That report is given here as Biran gives it; the sources on Tarmashirin's reign disagree even about its dates and the extent of his realm, and this module's argument does not depend on the abolition being total or permanent, only on its having been attempted and having contributed to his fall. On the Yuan: the Chinese capital, reign-eras and bureaucracy, the graded ethnic categories, the Tibetan Buddhist patronage and the 'Phags-pa script are standard.

On the *Pax Mongolica* and the counter-position: the relay system, the reduction of tolls, the safety of the routes and the traffic of Marco Polo's family, Rabban Sauma and Ibn Battuta are treated in this study's modules on information and extraction and follow the standard literature. The exchange of astronomical and medical knowledge between the Maragha observatory and the Chinese bureaus, and the westward

movement of printing, papermaking and cartography, are standard and are summarised rather than argued.

The reading offered here — that the sorting variable is the population the conquering elite *lives among* rather than the population it rules, and that the mechanism is developmental rather than calculative, which is why the divergence takes about three generations — is this study's own and is offered to be tested. The Golden Horde is presented as the decisive case for it, on the ground that the Horde's largest subject population was Orthodox and the Horde became Muslim; a reader who thinks the Kipchak steppe should count as "the population it ruled" rather than "the population it lived among" will find the distinction collapses and should say so.

Four disciplines close this study as they have governed it throughout. Every load-bearing quotation has been checked against a source reproducing the primary text, and where wording or provenance could not be confirmed the line has been dropped rather than guessed. Contested figures have been given as ranges with the chronicler named and his interest stated. The framework has been used as a lens and kept out of the narrative where the fact could carry the sentence alone. And legibility is not pardon: to reconstruct why a city was destroyed in order to price the surrender of the next twenty, or why a khan bought four priesthoods he did not believe, is to explain how the thing was organised and believed — not to grant that it was right.